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A BRAVE LADY.

VOL. II.

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A BRAVE LADY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,”

&c., &c.

“Be thou faithful unto death.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1870.

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LONDON
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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A BRAVE LADY.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. SCANLAN went to London. How he went is by no means clear: but I rather suspect it was through a pearl brooch, which a rich and warm-hearted bride, just going out to India—a neighbour's daughter—greatly desiderated, and purchased. At any rate, it came about somehow that Josephine's purse was full, her jewel-case rather empty, and that her husband took his jaunt to the metropolis—a pleasure which he had longed for ever since Mr. Summerhayes began his yearly visits to Ditchley and the neighbourhood.

I do not want to depict this Mr. Summerhayes in villanous colours, with horns and a

tail. I believe the very personage who owns those appendages may be not quite as black as he is painted, still I do not agree with those novel-writers who will not call a spade a spade—who make us interested in murder, lenient towards bigamy, and amused with swindling, provided only it be picturesque. There does not seem to me such a wide distinction between the vulgar man who steals a leg of mutton or a loaf of bread, and the “genteel” man—let me not profane the word “gentleman”—who dines luxuriously, but never thinks of paying his butcher or baker; who, however deficient his income, lives always at ease, upon money borrowed from friends or kindred, with promise of speedy return. But it never is returned—was never meant to be; and the man, however charming he may be, is neither more nor less than a thief and a liar, and ought to be scouted by society as such. And till society has the courage to do it—to strip the fine feathers from these fine birds, and show them in their ugly bareness, mean as any crop-headed convict in

Pentonville Prison—so long will the world be cumbered with them, and the miseries they cause. Not to themselves: *they* never suffer, often flourishing on like green bay-trees to the end, or almost the end; but to other and most innocent people, who unhappily belong to them, and perhaps even love them.

Mr. Summerhayes was one of these, and he became the evil genius of Mr. Scanlan's life. Though younger than the Curate, he was a great deal older in many things from his superior knowledge of the world. They sympathized in their tastes, and each found the other very convenient and amusing company, when, year by year, Summerhayes made his sketching tour round the beautiful neighbourhood of Ditchley. There were great differences between them—for instance, the elder man was weak and pliable, the younger cool-headed and determined; the Irishman possessed a fragment of a heart and the ghost of a conscience—the Englishman had neither. On many points, however, they were much alike—with enough

dissimilarity to make their companionship mutually agreeable and amusing. And as in both the grand aim of life was to be amused, they got on together remarkably well. Nay, in his own way, Edward Scanlan was really quite fond of "my friend Summerhayes."

So was César, for a while ; so was Adrienne—with the intense admiration that an imaginative child sometimes conceives for a young man, clever, brilliant, beautiful, godlike ; insomuch that the mother was rather sorry to see it, and stopped as soon as she could without observation the constant petting which the artist bestowed, summer after summer, upon his little girl-slave, who followed him about with eyes as loving as a spaniel dog. This year, when he succeeded in carrying off their father, the two children envied Papa exceedingly, scarcely so much for the pleasures of London as for the permanent society of Mr. Summerhayes.

This, however, he did not get, as he soon found himself obliged to "cut" his friend, and the set the artist belonged to—which, in spite

of their irreligious Bohemianism, the Curate liked extremely—for the sake of reviving his own former acquaintances, who had come up to attend the May meetings in Exeter Hall, and who were of a class, aristocratic and clerical, who looked down upon painters, poets, and such like, as devotees to the world, the flesh, and the devil,—and, besides, not exactly “respectable.” Mr. Scanlan had to choose between them, and he did so—externally; but he nevertheless contrived to serve two masters, in a way that excited the amusement and loudly-expressed admiration of Mr. Summerhayes.

Often, after being late up overnight, in places which Exeter Hall could never have even heard of, and which, to do him justice, the innocent Curate of Ditchley knew as little about as any young lamb of his fold—only Summerhayes asked him to go, and he went—after this he would appear at religious breakfasts, given by evangelical Earls, and pious Duchesses dowager, where he would hold forth for hours, delighted to see reviving his former popularity.

This did not happen immediately. At first he found the memories of even the best friends grew dulled after seven years' absence; but many were kind to him still. The exceeding sincerity and single-heartedness often found, then as now, among the Evangelical party—making them associate alike with rich and poor, patrician and plebeian—any one who, like themselves, holds what they believe to be “the Gospel”—stood Edward Scanlan in good stead.

After he had succeeded in making a platform speech—full of the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, the Woman in scarlet, and other favourite allegories by which, in that era of Catholic Emancipation struggles, the Orange party always designated the Romish Church—many of his old admirers rallied round the once popular preacher. But he was in London—not Dublin—and had to deal with cool-headed Englishmen, not impulsive Hibernians. Though his former friends had not forgotten him, and were very glad to see him, still he was no longer “the rage,” as he once had been.

His blossoming season had a little gone by. He hung his head "like a lily drooping," before those full-blown orators who now mounted the rostrum, and discoursed on the topics of the day with an energy and a power which carried all before them, because they had a quality which the brilliant Irishman somewhat lacked—earnestness.

Of all places, London is the one where people find their level; where only under peculiar circumstances, and never for very long, is gilding mistaken for gold. The Church of England was beginning to pass out of that stage which the present generation may still remember—when the humdrum sermons of the last century were, by a natural reaction, replaced by the "flowery" style of preaching; now, in its turn, also on the decline. Names, Irish and English—which it would be invidious here to record, but which were fondly familiar to the religious world of that date—were a little losing their charm, and their owners their popularity. Mere "words, words, words," however eloquently ar-

ranged and passionately delivered, were felt not to be enough. Something more real, more substantial, was craved for by the hungry seekers after truth—who had brains to understand, as well as hearts to love—besides the usual cant requirement of “souls to be saved.”

For such vital necessities the provender given by Mr. Scanlan and similar preachers was but poor diet. Vivid pictures of death and the grave, painted with such ghastly accuracy that it was no uncommon circumstance for poor women in fresh mourning weeds to be carried out fainting into the vestry; glowing descriptions of heaven, and horrible ones of hell, as minute and decisive as if the reverend gentleman had lately visited both regions, and come back to speak of them from personal observation—sermons of this sort did not quite satisfy the church-goers of the metropolis, even in the month of May, and amidst all the ardours of Exeter Hall. No—not though backed by the still handsome appearance and Irish fluency—which so often passed current for eloquence

—of the Curate of Ditchley. Many people asked who Mr. Scanlan was, and lamented, especially to his face, that he should be “thrown away” in such a far-distant parish; but nobody offered him a living, a proprietary chapel, or even a common curacy. And he found out that the inducements and advices held out by Mr. Summerhayes on the subject, were mere random talk, upon a matter concerning which the artist knew nothing. He had urged Scanlan’s coming up to London with the careless good-nature which they both possessed, but now that he was there, he found his guest rather a bore, and, in degree, turned the cold shoulder upon him. Between his two sets of friends, artistic and religious, it sometimes happened that the poor Curate had nowhere to resort to, and spent more than one lonely evening in crowded, busy London; which caused him to write home doleful letters to his wife, saying how he missed her, and how glad he should be to return to her. These letters filled her heart with rejoicing.

And when he did come back, a little crest-

fallen, and for the first day or so not talking much about his journey, she received him gladly and tenderly. But she rejoiced nevertheless. It was one of the sad things in Josephine's life that her husband's discomfiture was, necessarily, oftentimes to her a source of actual thankfulness. Not that she did not feel for his disappointment, and grieve over it in her heart, but she was glad he had found out his mistake. Her conscience was never deluded by her affections. She would as soon have led her boy César over ice an eighth of an inch thick, as have aided her husband in anything where she knew the attainment of his wish would be to his own injury.

Nevertheless, when he came home,—worn and irritable, fatigued with London excitements which were such a contrast to his ordinary quiet life, and none the better for various dissipations to which he had not the power to say No—Mrs. Scanlan was very sorry for him, and tried to make Wren's Nest as pleasant as possible to him, supplying him, so far as she could, with all

his pet luxuries, listening to his endless egotistical talk about the sensation he had created in London, and above all accepting patiently a heap of presents, more ornamental than useful, which she afterwards discovered he had purchased with money borrowed from Mr. Summerhayes, and which, with other extraneous expenses, caused this London journey to amount to much more than the pearl brooch would cover. And César had already gone to school; Louis too—for the brothers pined so at being separated. At school they must be kept, poor boys! cost what it would.

Many a night did their mother lie awake, planning ways and means which it was useless to talk of to her Edward. In fact she had very much given up speaking of late: she found it did no good and only irritated her temper, and confused her sense of right and wrong. She generally thought out things by herself, and mentioned nothing aloud until it was fully matured in her own mind. One plan, which had occurred to her several times since the day

when Mr. Scanlan satirically suggested that she should apply for a clerk's situation, and she had replied bitterly "I wish I could!" finally settled itself into a fixed scheme—that of earning money herself, independent of her husband. For that more money must be earned, somehow and by somebody, was now quite plain.

To the last generation, the idea of women working for their daily bread was new, and somewhat repellent. First, because it was a much rarer necessity then than now. Society was on a simpler footing. Women did work—in a sense—but it was within, not without the house: keeping fewer servants, dressing less extravagantly, and lightening the load of husbands and fathers by helping to save rather than to spend. There were more girls married, because men were not afraid to marry them; young fellows chose their wives as helpmates, instead of ornamental excrescences or appendages—expensive luxuries which should be avoided as long as possible. Consequently there were fewer families cast adrift on the world—help-

less mothers and idle thriftless sisters thrown on the charity of kindred, who have their own household to work for, and naturally think it hard to be burthened with more.

But, on the other hand, the feeling begun in chivalrous tenderness, though degenerating to a mere superstition, that it is not "respectable" for a woman to maintain herself, was much more general than now. And the passionate "I wish I could!" of poor Josephine Scanlan had been a mere outcry of pain, neither caused by, nor resulting in, any definite purpose. Gradually, however, the purpose came, and from a mere nebulous desire resolved itself into a definite plan.

She saw clearly enough that if, during the years that might elapse before her wealth came—years, the end of which she dared not look for, it seemed like wishing for Mr. Oldham's death—the family was to be maintained in any comfort, she must work as well as her husband. At first this was a blow to her. It ran counter to all the prejudices in which she had been rear-

ed ; it smote her with a nameless pain. What would her father have said?—the proud old nobleman, who thought his nobility not disgraced by becoming a teacher of languages, and even of dancing,—anything that could earn for him an honest livelihood ; who would have worked unceasingly himself, but never have allowed his daughter to work. Poor as they were, until her marriage Josephine had been the closely shut-up and tenderly guarded *Mademoiselle de Bougainville*. But Mrs. Scanlan was, and long had been, quite another person. Nobody guarded her ! Remembering her own old self, sometimes she could have laughed, sometimes rather wept.

But of that, and of a few other sad facts, her father had died in happy ignorance, and she was free. She must work—and she would do it.

But how ? There lay the difficulty, greater then than even in our day. A generation ago, no one supposed a woman in the rank of a lady could do anything but teach children. Teach-

ing, therefore, was the first thing Mrs. Scanlan thought of, but the scheme had many objections. For one reason, she was far from well-educated, and, marrying at sixteen, the little education she ever had would have soon slipped away, save for the necessity of being her children's instructress. She learned in order to teach; sometimes keeping only a short distance ahead of the little flock, who, however, being fortunately impressed with the firm belief that mamma knew everything, followed her implicitly, step by step, especially the little girls. But even the boys, fragmentary as their education was, had been found at school not half so ignorant as she expected. Everything they knew they knew thoroughly. So the master said, and this comforted their mother, and emboldened her to try if she could not find other little boys and girls about Ditchley, to teach with Adrienne, Gabrielle, and Martin. Very little children, of course, for she was too honest to take them without telling their parents the whole truth, that she had never been brought

up as a governess, and could only teach them as she had taught her own.

Gradually, in a quiet way, she found out who, among the rising generation of Ditchley, would be likely to come to her, as the mistress of a little day school, to be held in the parlour at Wren's Nest, or in any other parlour that might be offered her; and then, all her information gained, and her plans laid, she prepared herself for what she considered a mere form, the broaching of the subject to her husband.

To her surprise, it met with violent opposition.

"Keep a school! My wife keep a school!"—Edward Scanlan was horrified.

"Why should I not keep a school? Am I not clever enough?" said she, smiling. "Nevertheless, I managed to get some credit for teaching my boys, and now that they are away my time is free, and I should like to use it; besides," added she seriously, "it will be better for us that I should use it. We want more money."

"You are growing perfectly insane, I think,

on the subject of money!" cried the Curate in much irritation. "If we are running short, why not go again to Mr. Oldham and ask him for more, as I have so often suggested your doing?"

Ay, he had, till, by force of repetition, she had ceased to feel shame or indignation. But the suggestion was never carried out, for she set herself against it with a dull persistence, hard and silent as a rock, and equally invincible.

Taking no notice of her husband's last remark—for where was the good of wasting words?—she began quietly to reason with him about his dislike to her setting up a school.

"Where can be the harm of it? Why should I not help to earn the family bread? You work hard, Edward."

"That I do!" he cried eagerly.

"Why should not I work too? It would make me happier, and there is no disgrace in it."

"There is. What lady ever works? Shopkeepers' wives may help their husbands, but in our rank of life the husband labours only; the

wife sits at home and enjoys herself, as you do."

"Do I?" said Josephine, with a queer sort of smile. But she attempted not to retouch this very imaginative picture. Her husband would never have understood it. "But I do not wish to enjoy myself; I had rather help you and the children. Nor can I see any real reason why I should not do it."

"Possibly not; you have such odd ideas sometimes. If I were a tradesman, you could carry them out; stand behind the counter selling a pound of tea and a yard of tape, calculating every halfpenny, and putting it all by,—which I daresay you would much enjoy, and be quite in your element. But my wife—a clergyman's wife—could not possibly so degrade herself."

"Why, Edward, what nonsense! Many a clergyman's widow has turned schoolmistress."

"As my widow, you may; as my wife, never! I would not endure it! To come home and find you overrun by a troop of horrid brats,

never having a minute to spare for me; it would be intolerable. Besides, what would Ditchley say?"

"I do not know, and—excuse me, Edward—I do not very much care."

"But you ought to care. It is most important that I keep up my position, and that Ditchley should not know my exact circumstances. Why, the other day, when somebody was talking about how well we managed with our large family, I heard it said—‘Of course Mr. Scanlan must have, besides his curacy, a private fortune.’"

"And you let that pass? You allowed our neighbours to believe it?"

"Why should I not? It made them think all the better of me. But I fear I never shall get you to understand the necessity of keeping up appearances."

"I am afraid not," said Josephine, slowly. "Perhaps we had better quit the subject. Once again, Edward, will you give me your consent, the only thing I need, and without which I can-

not carry out my plans? They are so very simple, so harmless, so entirely for your own benefit and that of the family."

And in her desperation she did what of late she had rather given up doing; she began to reason and even to plead with her husband. But once again, for the hundredth time, she found herself at fault concerning him. She had not calculated on the excessive obstinacy which often co-exists with weakness. A strong man can afford to change his mind, to see the force of arguments and yield to them, but a weak person is afraid to give in. "I've said it, and I'll stick to it," is his only castle of defence, in which he entrenches himself against all assaults; unless, indeed, his opponent is cunning enough to take and lead him by the nose with the invisible halter of his own vanity and selfishness. But such a course this woman—all honest-minded women—would have scorned.

Mrs. Scanlan found her husband, in his own mild and good-natured way, quite impracti-

cable. He had taken it into his head that it was not "genteel" for a woman to work, especially a married woman; so work his wife should not, whatever happened.

"Not in any way, visible or invisible?" said she, with a slight touch of satire in her tone. "And is this charming idleness to be for my own sake, or yours?"

"For both, my dear; I am sure I am right. Think how odd it would look, Mrs. Scanlan keeping a school! If you had proposed to earn money in some quiet way, which our neighbours would never find out——"

"You would not have objected to that?" said Josephine eagerly.

"Very likely I might; but still not so much. However, I am quite tired of discussing this matter. For once, Josephine, you must give in. As I have so often to remind you, the husband is the head of the wife, and when I do choose to assert my authority—however, we will not enter upon that question. Just leave me to earn the money, and you stay quietly at

home and enjoy yourself, like other wives, and be very thankful that you have a husband to provide for you. Depend upon it, this is the ordinance of Scripture, which says that marriage is a great mystery."

"Yes," muttered Josephine, turning away with that flash of the eye that showed she was not exactly a tame creature to be led or driven, but a wild creature, tied and bound, that felt keenly, perhaps dangerously, the careless hand dragging at her chain.

Most truly, marriage was a mystery—to her. Why had Heaven mocked her with the sham of a husband, ordered her to obey him, who was too weak to rule; to honour him, whom, had he been a stranger, she would in many things have actually despised; to love him?—ah! there was the sharpest torture of her bonds. She had loved him once, and in a sort of way she loved him still. That wonderful, piteous habit of loving—the affection which lingers long after all passion has died, and respect been worn out—which one sees in the beggared peeress who

will not accept the remedy the law gives her, and part for ever from her faithless, spendthrift, brutal lord: in the costermonger's wife, who comes bleeding and maimed to the police-office, yet will not swear the peace against the savage she calls husband—nay, will rather perjure herself than have him punished—God knows there must be something divine in this feeling which He has implanted in women's breasts, and which they never fully understand until they are married.

I did not, and I have often marvelled at, sometimes even blamed, this Josephine Scanlan, whose little finger was worth more than her husband's whole body,—that to the end of his days, and her days, she cherished a strange tenderness for the man to whom she had been bound by the closest tie that human nature can know.

Some chance interrupted their conversation at this critical point, and before she could get an opportunity of reviving it—for Mr. Scanlan shirked the subject in every possible way—she

thought over the question, and arranged it in her own mind in a different form.

To go directly counter to her husband was impossible, and to yield to him equally so. That charming picture of domestic life with which he deluded himself, would result in leaving their children without bread. Certainly, the father earned money, but he spent it as fast as he earned it, in that easy, Irish fashion he had, which his poor old mother knew so well! As to how it was spent, nobody quite knew; but nobody seemed any the better for it. That creed, fortunately not a true one, which I once heard nobly enunciated by a stout father of a family, "that a married man must always sacrifice himself to either wife or children," did not number among its votaries the Rev. Edward Scanlan.

His wife must earn money; she knew that, but she thought she would take him at his word, and try to do it, as he said—"in some quiet way."

And suddenly a way suggested itself, after the curious fashion in which the bread we cast

upon the waters is taken up again after many days.

The woman who had been nurse to unhappy Mrs. Waters, overwhelmed by the fatal termination of her duties in this case, gave up her vocation as attendant on the insane; and, being a clever and sensible person, started a little shop for ladies' and children's clothes, lace-cleaning and mending, and other things for which the wealthy families hereabout had hitherto required to send to London. She prospered well—not unhelpt by advice from her good friend Mrs. Seaulan, whose exquisite French taste, and French skill in lace and embroidery-work, had never quite deserted her. In her need, Josephine thought whether she could not do for money what she used to do for pleasure. Priscilla Nunn always wanted “hands,” which were most difficult to find. Why should not the Curate's wife offer herself as “first hand,” doing the work at her own home, and if possible “under the rose”—that flower which must have been chosen as the emblem

of secrecy because it has so many thorns?

So had begun Mrs. Scanlan's scheme; but once again, as in that well-remembered mission to the Rectory, she took her courage *dans ses deux mains*, as her father would have said, and went to speak to Priscilla.

It was not so very hard after all. She was asking no favour; she knew she could give fair work for honest pay, and she did not feel degraded; not half so degraded as when—owing money to six shops in High Street—she had walked down Mr. Oldham's garden on that summer day which now seemed half a lifetime ago.

Priscilla was, of course, much astonished, but the quickness and delicacy of perception essential to one who had followed her melancholy *métier* for so many years, prevented her betraying this to the lady who wanted to work like a shop-girl.

She readily accepted the offer, and promised not to make the facts public if Mrs. Scanlan wished them concealed.

“You kept my secret once, ma’am,” she said, “and I’ll keep yours now. Not a soul in Ditchley shall find it out. I’ll tell all my ladies I send my work to be done in London.”

“Don’t do that, pray ! Never tell a falsehood on my account, it would make me miserable. And besides, for myself, I don’t care who knows ; only my husband.”

“I see, ma’am. Well, then, I’ll tell no stories, only just keep the matter to myself, which I can easily do. I am accustomed to hold my tongue ; and besides, I’ve nobody to speak to. Thank goodness !” she added, with a shrewd acerbity, that half amazed, half pained Mrs. Scanlan—“thank goodness, ma’am, I’ve got no husband.”

So the matter was decided, and the Curate’s wife took home with her a packet of valuable lace, which occupied her for many weeks, and brought her in quite a handful of money. Often it amused her extremely to see her handiwork upon her various neighbours, and to hear it admired, and herself congratulated as being the

means of inducing Priscilla Nunn to settle at Ditchley, such an advantage to the ladies of the neighbourhood.

Her faithful Bridget, and her fond little daughter Adrienne, of course soon found out her innocent mystery, but it was a good while before her husband guessed it. He was so accustomed to see her always at work that he never thought of asking questions. When at last he did, and she told him what she was doing, and why, he was a little vexed at first ; but he soon got over it.

“A very lady-like employment,” said he, touching the delicate fabric over which her eyes were straining themselves many hours a day. “And it keeps you a good deal within doors, which is much more proper than trailing everywhere with the children, as you used to do. And you are certain nobody has the slightest idea of your earning money?”

“Quite certain.”

“Well, then, do as you like, my dear. You are a very clever woman, the cleverest wo-

man I ever knew, and the most fitted to be my wife."

It did not occur to him, was he most fitted to be her husband? He took this side of the question with a satisfied complaisance, beautiful to behold.

But to her it mattered little. She did not weigh minutely the balance of things. She was doing her duty, both to him and the children, and that was enough for her. Especially when, after a time, she found her prevision more needful than she had expected; since there would ere long be seven little mouths to feed instead of six. She was not exactly a young woman now, and the cry "My strength faileth me!" was often on her lips. Never audibly, however; or nobody heard it but Bridget. But still ever and anon came the terror which had once before beset her—of dying, and leaving her children to the sole charge of their father. And the restlessness which ever since his journey to London had come upon Edward Scanlan at times, the murmurs that he was "not appre-

ciated at Ditchley," that he was "wasting his life," "rusting his talents," and so on, tried her more than any sufferings of her own.

Another sketch which just at this time Mr. Summerhayes took of her—Mr. Summerhayes, who still found it convenient and agreeable to come to Ditchley every summer, making his head-quarters within a walk of Wren's Nest, the hospitable doors of which were never shut against him by his good friend the Curate, who would forgive any shortcomings for the sake of enjoying "intellectual" society,—this portrait has, stronger than ever, the anxious look which, idealized, only added to the charm of Josephine's beauty; but in real life must have been rather painful to behold. She sat for it, I believe, under the impression that it might possibly be the last remembrance of her left to her children,—but Providence willed otherwise.

She laboured as long and as hard as she could to provide for the reception of this youngest child, welcome still, though, as Mr. Scanlan

once said, "rather inconvenient;" and then, quite suddenly, her trial came upon her: she laid herself down, uncertain whether she should rise up more. When she did, it was alone. That corner of Ditchley churchyard which she called *her* grave,—for two of her infants lay there—had to be opened in the moonlight to receive a third tiny coffin, buried at night, without any funeral rites, as unchristened babies are: babies that have only breathed for a minute this world's sharp air, and whom nobody thinks much of, except their mothers, who often grieve over them as if they had been living children.

But this mother, strange to say, did not grieve. When Bridget told her all about the poor little thing—for she had been unconscious at the time of its birth, and her head 'wandered' for several days afterwards—in consequence, her servant angrily believed, of some "botherations" of Mr. Scanlan's which he talked to his wife about, when any husband of common sense would have held his tongue—Jose-

phine looked in Bridget's face with a strange, wistful smile.

"Don't cry, don't cry; it is better as it is. My poor little girl! It was a girl? And she was very like me, you say? Did her father see her at all?"

"Can't tell," replied Bridget, abruptly.

"Never mind; we'll not fret. My little lamb! she is safer away. There is one woman less in the world to suffer. I am content she died."

And when Mrs. Scanlan was seen again in her customary household place, and going about her usual duties, there was indeed a solemn content, even thankfulness, in her face. She never had another child.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING the sad domestic interregnum, when she had the law entirely in her own hands, Bridget Halloran, with her usual acuteness, stimulated by her passionate fidelity, did not fail to discover the whole length and breadth of the "botheration" which, she firmly believed, had been the cause of the all but fatal termination of her dear mistress's illness. And the root of it was that root of all bitterness in Wren's Nest,—Mr. Summerhayes.

Mrs. Scanlan disapproved of him in a passive, though reticent and unobnoxious way, but Bridget cordially hated Mr. Summerhayes. Perhaps he had betrayed himself more carelessly to the servant than he did before the lady, unto whom he was always exceedingly courteous: perhaps,

human nature being weak, Bridget had taken umbrage at things the children let out concerning his ridicule of her ugliness and her rough, odd ways ; or, more likely, he had rivalled her awhile in the affections of that little flock, who were the idols of her fond and jealous heart. At any rate, there was secretly war to the knife between the servant and her master's friend ; whom Bridget believed, and not without reason, to be anything but the friend of her mistress and the family. Possibly, though she never said it, the mistress thought the same.

It may be urged that a true and loving wife has no cause to dread any other influence—certainly not any male influence—over her husband : none can possibly be so strong as her own. But this must depend greatly upon what sort of man the husband may be. If he is a mere weathercock, blown about by every wind, she has much reason to be careful from which quarter the wind blows. The influence which Mr. Summerhayes gained over Mr. Scanlan was exactly that which a strong bad man

can always exercise over an amiable weak one—taking him on his weakest side, and leading him by means of his tastes, his follies, or his prejudices. This was apparent even to the inexperienced eyes of Bridget Halloran. She—good, ignorant woman!—had never seen that wonderful engraving of Satan playing with the young man for his soul, or she would have likened her master to one of the players, and his friend to the other; while in the sorrowful angel who stands behind, striving to the last for the possession of that poor fool who is perhaps hardly worth striving for, she would at once have seen another likeness, another good angel, such an one as few men have, or similar struggles might not end as they so often do—in blank defeat.

The contest must have been sore on the day before Mrs. Scanlan was taken ill. It seemed Mr. Summerhayes had “got into difficulties”—to use the mild term in which society puts such things; in fact, he was flying from his creditors, who had at last risen up indignant against the

fascinating gentleman who for years had played a deep game of deception with them all. There are some people who, more than even being wronged, abhor being made a fool of, and two or three of these pursued relentlessly the man of fashion who, after cheating them in every possible way, had tried to free himself from them by calling his art a trade, and by some legal chicanery making himself a bankrupt instead of an insolvent. He had been some days in hiding, and then, driven to the last extremity, implored to be hidden at Wren's Nest.

This Mrs. Scanlan steadfastly withstood. Perhaps she might have sheltered a noble traitor, but a "thief"—as she very plainly put it—had no interest in her eyes. She was deaf to all her husband's arguments, entreaties, threats; she declared positively the swindler should not enter her doors; but the resistance nearly cost her her life.

These facts Bridget ingeniously discovered, and the consequence was, that one day when, taking advantage of the forlorn state of the

garrison, Mr. Summerhayes appeared, he had the door shut in his face, and was summarily taken possession of by the enemy, a wolf in sheep's clothing, who had tracked him safely to Ditchley. The law caught hold of him, and consigned him to the jail which, in Bridget's opinion, he richly deserved. Possibly, had he been an Irishman and her friend, she might have thought differently, and have resisted rather than abetted "the powers that be"—for poor Bridget's heart always had clearer vision than her head; but being what he was, and she what she was, he found with her no mercy, only stern justice. Bridget triumphed over her victim like Jael over Sisera, with a righteous triumph, which she did not fail to betray to the only one to whom she could betray—poor little Miss Adrienne, who listened, and wept! For the child was growing up into a maiden of fourteen, and the only hero in her life had been this young man, so clever, so handsome, viewed with reverence as well as admiration, being so many years older than herself. Hapless Adrienne! al-

ready she could not bear to have a word said to the disparagement of Mr. Summerhayes.

Bridget shut the door upon him; and her master, when he found it out, was furious. Even her mistress thought the thing might have been done more gently, and was rather glad when, by some loophole of justice, the artist crept out of his durance vile, and escaped abroad, where by nothing worse than letters could he attack her husband. And when gradually on her complaining a little of them and their constant hints for assistance, the letters ceased, her spirits revived. She thought if this baleful influence were once removed from Edward Scanlan's life, her own life might become brighter. For she loved brightness, this sorely-tried woman. She never lingered a moment longer than she could help under the fringe of the cloud.

One small shadow, however, that cloud left behind for long. Mr. Scanlan's dislike to Bridget increased every day. Her ugliness and roughness had always been an annoyance to

him, but the worst thing was, that she, with her sharp eyes, had long ago seen through "the masther," and no man likes to be seen through, especially by his servants.

Besides, Bridget's passionate devotion to "the misthress" caused her to make perpetual and not always silent protest against things which Mrs. Scanlan herself bore with perfect equanimity, for long habit scarcely even notices them—small daily sacrifices which an unselfish nature is perpetually offering to a selfish one, and a woman to a man—whether for his good is not always clear. And Bridget, being an inveterate man-hater, resented this.

Unquestionably, Bridget could not have been always a pleasant person to have in the house. She was a special bugbear to Edward Scanlan with whom her warm Irish heart counted as nothing against her sharp Irish tongue, edged with shrewd mother-wit, and weighted by the sterling honesty which detects at once anything like a sham. He not merely disliked her, he actually dreaded her, and tried every means, not open,

but underhand, to get rid of her. They all failed, however. When she left Ireland Bridget had declared she would live and die with her dear mistress, and she kept her word. She stuck like a burr to the struggling household at Wren's Nest, blind to all hints, deaf to all scoldings—totally indifferent on the subject of wages, or of “bettering her-self,” as her master sometimes urged. She would not go ; and both she and her mistress knew perfectly well that she could not go. For what new servant would have been content with Bridget's wages—have lived upon Bridget's scanty fare—have put up with every sort of inconvenience, and still gone working on “like a horse,” as Bridget did? Above all, who would have loved them, one and all, as Bridget loved them?

And in this story, where I am convinced of shooting many a sharp arrow against the Irish nation—casting dust—ah, well!—on the graves of my children's forefathers—let me confess with tears over another grave, where I myself lately laid Bridget Halloran's dear old head,

that I believe she is not an untrue type of many Irishwomen: women carrying under their light lively manners hearts as true as steel, and as pure and fresh as their own green meadows and blue skies—cheerful themselves and cheering others, to the last limit of a blessed old age. I have known such; and I wish—oh! my dear, sincere, formal, gentle Englishwomen; my brave, true, narrow-minded, large-hearted Scotchwomen—I wish I knew a few more!

The whole course of Bridget's relations with the family of which she considered herself a member, was a queer mixture of tragedy and comedy, which climaxed to a point when there appeared unexpectedly a quite legitimate mode of getting rid of her. The Rectory gardener—an elderly widower, with a large family—who had long noted Bridget's good qualities, balanced them against her defects; and having very deaf ears and no eye for beauty, considered that she would make him a capital wife. Accordingly he asked her formally in marriage, and of Mr. Scanlan, who, with great amaze-

ment and ill-concealed satisfaction, forwarded the old fellow's suit by every means in his power.

But Bridget refused to smile upon her ancient lover—not that his antiquity was against him: she said, “Old men were much better than young ones; she'd rather marry the Rector than any curate in the neighbourhood, if she was a lady. But,” she added severely, “not a man in the world was to be depended on; she'd seen too much of matrimony to wish to try it herself.” Which remark, being repeated to him unconsciously by one of his “little pitchers,” who have always such proverbially “long ears,” did not greatly gratify Mr. Scanlan.

I fear he may be considered, after all, an ill-used man, playing a rather subordinate part in his own household. But people get what they can; and there is one thing which no sham reverence will impart to its object—dignity. It is no easy thing to set up as the household deity an idol, not of gold, but clay, from whom the

gilding is perpetually rubbing off, and the baser material appearing in the eyes even of children and servants; so that nothing but the assertion of an absolute falsehood can maintain the head of the family as a "head" at all. Oh! how thankful ought those families to be who really have a head to worship—with the real devotion which is his rightful due who, as husband, father, and master, righteously fulfils his duties, and is in truth God's vicegerent upon earth unto those who with all their hearts love, honour, and obey him. Knowing what such loyalty is, it is with tears rather than wrath or ridicule that I draw this inevitable picture of Edward Scanlan.

He was a very unfortunate man, and thought himself so, though for other causes than the true ones. He counted as nothing his bright, clever, handsome wife, his healthy children, his settled income, but was always wearying for some blessing he had not got—to be a popular preacher, a great author, a man of wealth and fashion. He envied his rich neighbours every

luxury they had, and would have aped their splendour constantly with his own pinchbeck imitations of the same, had not his wife withstood him steadily. She tried all possible arguments to make him live simply, modestly; resting upon his sure dignity as a minister of God, who has no need to pay court to any man; whose mere presence is an honour, and who may receive the best society without deviating in the least from his own natural household ways.

For instance, that small snobbishness of a poor man asking rich men to dinner, and giving them dinners like their own, seemed contemptible to the "blue blood" of Josephine Scanlan. When Lady Emma Lascelles came to the Rectory, and walked over, as she always did, to the children's tea at Wren's Nest, Mrs. Scanlan gave her a cordial welcome, the best she had of food and drink, and nothing more. But Mr. Scanlan would have feasted her on silver and gold, and let the family fast for a week to come.

Small differences such as these—springing from the fact that the husband has one standard of right and the wife another, and that they look at things from totally opposite points of view—caused the wheels of life to move not always smoothly in the Scanlan household. How *can* two walk together, unless they be agreed? especially when they have children, and every year the young eyes grow sharper, and the little minds wider and clearer. Alas! often when the wife's agony has grown dulled by time, the mother's but begins. Many a day, had she been alone, Mrs. Scanlan, in very weariness of warfare, would have laid down her arms, indifferent, not merely to prudence and imprudence, but almost to right and wrong. Now she dared not do it, for the sake of her children. To bring them up honestly, simply; in the fear of God and total fearlessness of man, was her one aim and one desire: and to do this she again and again buckled on her armour for this pitiable domestic skirmishing, this guerilla warfare; having to fight inch by inch of her

way, not in an open country, but behind bushes and rocks. For, as I before said, Edward Scanlan was at heart a coward; and his wife was not. In most contests between them, he ended by precipitately quitting the ground, leaving his melancholy victress to gaze, more humiliated than victorious, round upon her desolate battlefield.

She did this the day after Bridget had given the final *congé* to her lover, and declared her determination not to be “druv out o’ the house,” but remain a fixture there as long as she lived; which Mrs. Scanlan honestly said she thought was the best thing possible for the family. So Mr. Scanlan had to yield; but the domestic atmosphere was not sunny for a week or more; the mistress had a sad worn face, and the master allowed himself to be irritable over trifles, in a way patent even to chance visitors—to the Rector, for instance.

“I’ll tell you what, Scanlan,” said he, one afternoon, when he had spent an hour or two, after his wont, with the family; “you are a

good fellow, and a very amusing fellow, but you ought to have been a bachelor."

"I wish I had. It would have saved me a world of trouble," replied the Curate, laughing. But he seemed a little vexed for all that. He liked always to appear the amiable pater-familias. It looked so very much better in a clergyman. And many a time, when visitors were by, he would put his arm round his girls' waists, and pat his boys on the shoulder,—caresses which these young people received at first with awe and pleasure, then with hesitation, at last with a curious sort of smile. Little folks are so sharp!—sharper than big folks have any idea of.

I will not say these children did not love their father, for he was good-natured to them; and they clung to him with the instinct of lifelong habit; but they did not respect him, they did not rely upon him. "Oh! papa says so," which meant that secondary evidence was necessary; or, "Papa intends it," which implied that the thing would never be done,—grew to

be familiar phrases in the household. The mother had simply to shut her ears to them ; for to explain them, to argue against them, above all, to reprove them, was impossible.

And thus time went on, and it was years since the day she had heard Mr. Oldham's intentions with regard to her, which at first seemed to make such a momentous difference in her life, but at last sunk into a mere visionary fancy, scarcely believed in at all.

Besides, sad to say, but not wonderful, the secret which she thought would have been a permanent bond of union between herself and her good old friend turned out quite the contrary ; rather a bar of separation between them. Her sensitive pride took alarm lest, silent as she was by his command, any filial attentions she might show to him might be misinterpreted ; supposed by him to be meant to remind him of his promise. For the same reason all her difficulties and anxieties, yearly accumulating, she hid from him with the utmost care ; complainings might have been construed into an entreaty for

help, or for some change in the difficult and anomalous position in which he had placed her, and allowed her to remain.

It was indeed most difficult ; especially with regard to the children, of whom, as he grew feebler, Mr. Oldham's notice gradually lessened. They obviously wearied him, as the young do weary the old. And their mother could not bear to intrude them upon him ; would scarcely ever send them to the Rectory, where they used to be such constant guests, lest, as he once said, they might "remind him of his death," and of their own future heirship ; also, lest their somewhat provincial manners and shabby dress should be a tacit reproach to him for his half-and-half kindness towards them. For their mother acutely felt that a hundred pounds spent upon them now would be worth more than a thousand ten years hence, if Mr. Oldham lived so long. She would sit calculating how late César might go to college, with any hope of succeeding there ; and whether Adrienne and the younger ones could acquire enough accomplishments

to make them fit for their probable position. And then she caught herself reckoning—horrible idea!—how long the term of mortal life usually extends, and how long it was likely to extend in Mr. Oldham's case, until she started up, loathing her own imagination, feeling as guilty as if she were compassing the old man's death, and wondering whether the promised fortune was a blessing or an actual curse; for it seemed both alternately.

Sometimes the hope of the future was the only thing that made her present life endurable; again, it haunted her like an evil spirit, until she felt her very nature slowly corrupting under its influence. She was conscious of having at once a bitter scorn for money, and yet an exaggerated appreciation of its value, and an unutterable craving to possess it. Then oftentimes she felt herself such an arrant hypocrite. Luckily, her husband never talked of the future, it was not his way; he took things easily, would have eaten calmly his last loaf, and then been quite surprised that the cupboard was empty. But

Bridget often let out her own humble fears about "them poor dear children," and the way they were growing up; and one or two of her neighbours came and advised with her on the subject: wondering what she meant to do with César, and whether, presently, he would not be able to leave the grammar-school and get a small clerkship, or be apprenticed to some respectable—very respectable—trade. To all of which remarks and not unkindly anxieties she had but one answer, given with a desperate bluntness which made people comment rather harshly upon how very peculiar Mrs. Scanlan was growing,—that "she did not know."

It was the truth: she really did not know. Mr. Oldham's total silence on the subject often made her fancy she must have mistaken him in some strange way, or that he had changed his mind altogether concerning her. The more so, as there gradually grew up a slight coolness between him and her husband. Whether it was that the Rector had offended the huge self-

esteem of his curate—and of all enmity, the bitterest is that of a vain man whose vanity has been wounded; or else the Curate had been seen through—clearer than ever—by the astute and acute old Rector; but certainly they never got on well when they did meet, and they gradually met as seldom as possible. Mr. Oldham generally called at Wren's Nest when Mr. Scanlan was absent; and Mr. Scanlan always found an excuse ready for sending his wife alone, when invitations came from the Rectory.

Yet still he every now and then harped upon his stock grievance—the great injustice with which he was treated in being so underpaid, and compelled, for the sake of wife and family, to hide his light under a bushel at Ditchley, when he might be acquiring fame and fortune in London. And still he at times suggested going there, or threatening to go, that, to detain him, Mr. Oldham might still further increase his salary. To all of which notions and projects his wife opposed a firm, resolute negative, that of silence. She let him talk as much as he

liked, and he dearly enjoyed talking; but she herself spoke no more.

At length a thing happened which broke this spell of sullen dumbness—broke it perhaps for her good, for she felt herself slowly freezing up into a hard and bitter woman. Still the way the blow fell was sharp and unexpected.

Her husband came home one night, irritable exceedingly. Now, many a wife knows well enough what that means, and her heart yearns over the much-tried man, who has been knocked about in the world all day, and comes to her for rest, and shame if he cannot find it! even though he may task her patience and forbearance a little sometimes. But irritability was not Edward's failing; he rather failed in the opposite direction—in that imperturbable indifference to all cares and all troubles which did not personally annoy himself, which often passes muster as "the best temper in the world." Though, undoubtedly, he was by nature a better temper than his wife, in whom circumstances were gradually increasing certain acerbities, not uncommon in strong

and high-spirited women, but yet far from beautiful. And Mr. Scanlan's easy *laissez aller* tried Mrs. Scanlan to the last limit of feminine endurance.

To-day, however, they seemed to have changed characters. She was calm, and he was sorely out of humour. He found fault with Bridget, the children, the house, everything; nay, even with herself, which he did not often do. And he looked so ill and wretched, lying on the sofa all the evening, and scarcely saying a word to any one, that she grew alarmed.

When the children had gone to bed, the secret came out: not naturally, but dragged out of him, like a worm out of its hole, and then pieced together little by little, until, in spite of numerous concealments and contradictions, Mrs. Scanlan arrived at a tolerable idea of what was wrong.

Her husband had gone and done what most men of his temperament and character are very prone to do—it looks so generous to oblige a friend, and flatters one's vanity to be able to

do it ; he put his name to a bill of accommodation. The "friend" turned out, as such persons usually do, a mere scoundrel, and had just vanished, to Greece, or Turkey, or Timbuctoo, little matter where ; but he could not be found, and the acceptor of the bill had to pay it all.

"I declare, Josephine, I had no idea of such a thing," pleaded he eagerly ; "I thought it was a mere form : and after it was done I quite forgot all about it. I did indeed, my dear wife."

"I fully believe you," Josephine said, bitterly.

Hitherto she had opposed not a word to his stream of talk, explanations, regrets, apologies. He never looked at her, or he would have seen her slowly whitening face, her rigid mouth, and knotted hands.

"But isn't it unlucky ? so very unlucky for me ?"

"For us, you mean," said Mrs. Scanlan slowly. "But do you think you can tax your memory enough to tell me just two facts ? How

much have you to pay? and how soon must you pay it?"

Facts were not the prominent peculiarity of Edward Scanlan; but at last she elicited from him that the bill was over-due, and that it amounted to two hundred pounds.

"Two hundred pounds! And when did you sign it?"

"A year ago—six months—I really forget."

She looked at him with her indignant eyes:

"Edward, why did you not tell me at the time?"

"Oh, my dear, you would have made such a fuss about it. And, besides, it was merely signing my name. I never expected to be called upon to pay a farthing. I never should have been, but that my friend——"

"You have never said yet who is your friend."

"Ah, that was your fault. You always disliked him, so that I could not mention him. Otherwise I should never have thought of not telling you. It was your doing, you see: you

were always so unjust to poor Summerhayes."

"So—it was Mr. Summerhayes for whom you accepted the bill?"

"I could not help it, Josephine, I assure you. He kept writing to me letter after letter."

"What letters? I never saw them."

Edward Scanlan blushed; yes, he had the grace to blush.

"No, they never came here: I knew they would only make you angry, so I had them directed to the Post-office. In fact, my darling, I was really afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" said Josephine, turning away. And as she did so there crept into her heart a feeling worse than indignation, jealousy, or wounded love—the most fatal feeling any wife can have—not anger, but contempt for her husband.

Edward Scanlan was mistaken; she made no "fuss" about this. Women like her seldom waste their strength in idle struggles against the inevitable. She bore the disastrous revelation so quietly that he soon began to think it

had not affected her at all, and recovered his spirits accordingly. If Josephine did not mind it, of course the thing could be of no consequence: she would find a way out of it; she was so sensible a woman. For among the pathetic bits of good in him, which accounted for his wife's lingering love, was this unfailing belief in her, and unlimited reliance upon her. Surely, with the aid and counsel of his good Josephine, he would be able to swim through that unpleasant affair. "Unpleasant" was the only light in which it occurred to him. The actual sin of the thing, and the weakness, almost amounting to wickedness, of a man who, rather than say No to another man, will compromise the interests of his own nearest and dearest, did not strike in any way the curate of Ditchley. He became quite cheerful.

"I am so glad to see how well you take it. Truly, my dear, you are the best wife in England, and I always say so to everybody. And since you agree with me that I could not avoid

this difficulty, I hope you will help me in trying to get out of it."

"How?"

"By going to Mr. Oldham, and asking him to lend us the money. He has lots of capital lying idle, I know that—and two hundred pounds is nothing to him, even if he gave it instead of lending it. But I don't ask him to give it, only to lend it, and on ample security."

"On what security?"

"My own; my I O U—my 'promise to pay,' which perhaps you don't understand; women are so ignorant about business. Personal security is of course all I can offer, unless I had a fortune. Heigho! I wish somebody—some wealthy old spinster, or miserly old bachelor like Oldham, would leave me one!"

Josephine's breath almost failed her. Though her husband had spoken in the most random, careless way, she looked at him in terror, as if he knew the truth. But no: her own timorous conscience had been alone to blame.

“Why, Josephine, how red you have turned! Have I said such a dreadful thing, or are you getting furious, as usual, because I suggest applying to Mr. Oldham for money? Not in the old way, you will observe; this way is quite legal and unobjectionable—a transaction between gentleman and gentleman; and he ought to feel rather flattered that I do apply to him. But you—you seem as frightened of that poor old fellow—who is fast breaking down, I see—as if he were the Great Mogul himself.”

Josephine paused a little. In her answer it was necessary to weigh every word.

“Edward,” she said at last, “if you do this you must do it yourself. I cannot and will not beg from Mr. Oldham in any shape or under any pretext. He pays us sufficiently, and more than sufficiently, and I wish to keep free from all obligations to him.”

“You are perfectly silly! Why should we not get as much out of him as we can? He has no children, as we have, and goodness only knows who is his heir, if he has any. He may

leave all his money to a college or a foundling hospital. Let him! Who cares?"

"No one ought to care. It is his own, to do what he likes with."

"Bless me! If I thought I had the slightest chance, wouldn't I have a try for it! If the Rector would only leave his property to his poor curate—not the most unnatural thing, either!—why, we might almost live upon *post obits*."

"Will you tell me what is a *post obit*?"

"You innocent dear woman! Only a bond, given as security for money advanced, to be paid after the death of one's father, or uncle, or any one to whom one is lawful heir. Many a young fellow supports himself for years upon *post obits*. I only wish I had a chance of trying the system."

"Fortunately, you have none," said his wife, in her hard unwifely tone. And yet, had she been married to a hero, nay, to an ordinarily upright and high-minded man, Josephine Scanlan would any day have died for her husband!

Harder still, she would have helped him to die. She was the sort of woman to have gone with him to the very foot of the scaffold, clung around his haltered neck, or laid his disgraced head upon her bosom, heeding nothing for worldly shame, so that she herself could reverence him still. But now? Well, the man was—what he was; and alas! he was her husband.

She might have been too hard upon him, exacting from him a nobility of thought and action of which few are capable—striving for ever to pull out the mote from his eyes, and forgetting the beam in her own. And yet—and yet——”

I cannot judge—I dare not. When I—Winifred (not Winifred Weston now) look at the dear face opposite to me, on my own hearth, I know that such a marriage would have maddened *me*.

Ignorant as she was in many worldly things, Mrs. Scanlan knew enough to see that, though her husband had brought himself into it foolish-

ly rather than guiltily, his position was very critical. Unless he could meet the bill, he would have to give up everything he had—and that was not worth two hundred pounds. No wonder that, as she drew him back again to the subject in hand, and they began to discuss every possible way in which he could avoid the consequences of his imprudence, Edward Scanlan gradually became so terrified that, even with the demon of contempt lurking at the bottom of her heart, his wife felt almost sorry for him.

“Help me! do help me!” he cried. “I have nobody in the wide world to help me but you.”

That was true; truer far than he meant it to be. For the once charming Curate had a little worn out the admiration of his flock. He got fewer invitations than he used to have, and those among the new rather than the old inhabitants of Ditchley. Of these latter, the younger folks began to look upon him as a middle-aged father of a family; and the seniors found, both

in his conversation and character, a certain lack of that stability and wisdom which replace so nobly, in many men, the attractiveness of youth. Perhaps, too, others besides Bridget and Mr. Oldham, when thrown in nearer relationship with him, had, in course of years, "seen through" Mr. Scanlan. At any rate, his popularity was a little waning in the neighbourhood; and if he did not guess the fact, his wife did—pretty plainly.

As to how it affected her—well! a man might not easily understand, but I think most women would. When he said—with what he did not know was truth, only pitiful appeal—"I have nobody to help me but you"—and leant his head on her shoulder, his wife did not thrust him away; she drew him closer, with a sad tenderness.

"Poor Edward!" said she softly. "Yes; I will help you if I can."

And she sat a long time, thinking; while Mr. Scanlan went on talking, arguing with her in every possible form the duty and necessity of

her making application to Mr. Oldham. She returned no answer, for another scheme had darted into her mind. Alas! she was growing into a painfully quickwitted woman—as alive to the main chance, she often thought, as any man could be.

Those jewels of hers—long put by and never used—they were worth fully two hundred pounds. She knew that by the brooch she had once sold. She had never tried to sell any more; she thought she would keep them, these relics of her youth and her early married life, until the day when her prosperous condition would make them suitable for her wearing. But now, if she could dispose of them, temporarily, to some friend who would generously allow her to redeem them! And then she thought of Lady Emma Lascelles, between whom and herself had sprung up something as like friendship as could well exist between a curate's wife, and an earl's daughter married to a millionaire.

“I will get Lady Emma's address from the

Rectory, and write to her." And then she explained to Mr. Scanlan the reason why.

He did not object, having fallen into that dejected condition in which he never objected to anything, but let his wife do just as she liked. Nor did he now take a sentimental view of her parting with her marriage pearls; the practicalities of life had long since knocked all sentiment out of him. He only implored her to conduct the transaction with the utmost care, and let nobody know, especially the Rector.

"For I think—indeed, I am sure—that somebody has given him a hint about the matter. He sent me a rather curt note requesting me to come and speak to him at ten o'clock to-morrow morning on my way to the vestry-meeting. It may be only about vestry business; but I wish I was well out of it, or I wish you could go instead of me, my dearest Josephine."

"I wish I could," she said with a mixture of pity and bitterness; and then stopped herself from saying any more.

They took the pearls out of her jewel case, a

beautiful set—the bridegroom's present on her wedding-day. But neither referred to that; possibly, neither remembered the fact; these memories wear out so strangely fast amid all the turmoil and confusion of life; and the crisis of the present was too imminent, the suspense too great.

“Lady Emma is at Paris now, I think; but I can easily get her exact address. I will go up to the Rectory for it to-morrow morning; or you could ask yourself, Edward.”

“Not I. I will have nothing to do with it. Manage your own affairs.”

“My own affairs!” Well, they were her own now—her children's whole future might be at stake on the chance of Lady Emma's acting promptly and kindly. But there was little fear, she had so good a heart.

“I feel sure she will buy them,” said Mrs. Scanlan, locking up the case again. “And I shall beg her to let me buy them back if ever we are rich enough for me to wear them.”

“You will never wear them,” said the Curate

drearily. "Depend upon it, Josephine, we are slowly sinking—sinking into abject poverty. You would not let me get a chance of rising in the world, and now you must reap the results. Mark my words, your sons will end in being mere tradesmen—wretched petty tradesmen." For Mr. Scanlan, being only a generation removed from that class, had a great contempt for it, and a great dread of being in any way identified or mixed up with it.

"My sons!" cried the poor mother, suddenly remembering them and what they might come to, if at this crisis things went ill, if no money were attainable to meet the bill, and it were put into a lawyer's hands; when, supposing Mr. Scanlan were unable to pay it, he would be sent to prison. After such a dire disgrace it would be all over with him and them all, for Mr. Oldham would never receive him again as curate, and Ditchley, which, with all its narrowness, was quite old-fashioned in its innocent honesty, certainly never would.

"My poor boys," Mrs. Scanlan repeated pite-

ously; then started up erect, her black eyes flashing and her whole figure dilated. "I do not *caré*," she said; "whatever happens, I do not care. Edward, I had rather see my César, my Louis, an honest butcher or baker than a thief of a 'gentleman'—like your friend Mr. Summerhayes."

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER his wife's fierce ebullition about "a thief of a gentleman," Mr. Scanlan did the only wise thing a husband could do under the circumstances—he held his tongue. Next morning even, he took every opportunity, not of renewing but of eluding the subject. Fortunately he had to leave early ; and after he had started for a long day of what he called "parish duties,"—which meant a brief vestry-meeting and a long series of pastoral visits afterwards to luncheon, dinner, and so on, at various hospitable houses—Josephine sat down to collect her thoughts before she paid her call at the Rectory.

Though she saw Mr. Oldham less often than of yore, and there had grown up between them

a vague reserve, still she knew he liked her still, and she liked him very sincerely. Both the old man and the young woman had instinctively felt from the first that theirs were sympathetic and faithful natures, and no drawbacks of circumstances could alienate the firm friendship between them, though it was one of those dormant friendships which sometimes never thoroughly awaken in this world, and, ceasing out of it, leave us with the feeling, less of what they were, than what they might have been. Nevertheless, the tie between Mrs. Scanlan and the old Rector was strong enough to make it difficult for her to disguise from him her present heavy anxiety, especially if, as her husband suspected, he had some inkling of it already. What if he questioned her why she wanted Lady Emma's address? Some simple feminine reason might easily be assigned, but that Josephine scorned. No small womanish arts were at all in her line; she must always go straight to her point. If Mr. Oldham asked her, she must, of course, tell him the exact state of the

case ; but, for her husband's sake, she determined to keep it back as long as possible.

These anxious thoughts showed so plainly in her face, that Bridget, coming into the parlour to find out the cause of her mistress's unusual state of quiescence, read them at once.

“ You've got another botheration, ma'am, I see. Tell it me, do. The children are safe out of doors ; look at 'em all playing in the garden, so full o' fun ! It'll do your heart good, ma'am dear.”

Poor Bridget had touched the right chord ; the hard, stony look passed from Mrs. Scanlan's face ; she began to weep, and once beginning she could not stop. By degrees her faithful servant had coaxed her out of half her trouble, and guessed the rest.

Bridget drew a long breath, and, being behind her mistress's back, clenched her sturdy fist and pulled her good ugly face into a succession of villanous frowns, which might be meant for anybody or nobody,—but she said nothing. And there, I think, the poor servant de-

serves some credit, and some pity too. Her life was a long series of self-suppression. What she felt towards her mistress and the children was patent enough; her feelings towards her master nobody knew. It is hard to disguise love; but it is still harder to hide its opposite; and, perhaps, the hardest thing of all is to see the object of one's love a willing deluded victim to the object of one's—not hatred, perhaps—but intense aversion and contempt. Bridget despised her master; there was no doubt about that; yet I feel sure that throughout her life she never let her mistress know it. Which fact, I think, may fairly place the poor unlettered Irishwoman in the rank of heroines.

Bridget had no question that Lady Emma would buy the jewels, and hold her tongue on the matter too. “She was a rare lady, and could keep a secret.” Logic, at which Mrs. Scanlan smiled faintly. But still in many ways the devotedness of the woman comforted her heart—not for the first time.

It may seem strange, and some people may

be much scandalized at it, that this poor lady should be so confidential with her servant, more so than with her husband. But it must be remembered that in both Irish and French households the relation between superiors and inferiors is both freer and closer than it is in England generally; and, besides, she could trust Bridget. No shams with her; no mean, double-minded, worldly ways; no half-truths, or prevarications arranged so cleverly as, without telling an actual lie, to give the appearance of one. Irish though she was—(I confess with sorrow an all but universal Celtic fault!)—Bridget had learnt, difficultly and painfully, to “tell truth and shame the devil,” and her mistress loved her accordingly.

“Wish me good speed,” said she, as the loving servant threw something after her from the door “for luck.” “I trust I may come back with a lighter heart than I go.”

And slipping away out of sight of her little folks, who would have overwhelmed her with questions about her unusual errand to Ditchley

alone, Mrs. Scanlan walked quickly across the common, even as she had done the day she had first heard Mr. Oldham's secret, years ago.

How many they seemed! And how many more appeared to have slipped by since she was married! Married—on just such a morning as this, a soft February morning, with the sap just stirring in the leafless trees, the buds forming on the bare hedges, the sky growing blue, and the sunshine warm, and the thrushes beginning to sing, all the world full of youth and hope, and half-awakened spring, as her life was then. For she had loved him; with a foolish, girlish, half-fledged love; still, undoubtedly, she had loved him, this Edward Scanlan, whom now she could hardly believe sometimes was the Edward she had married.

A frantic vision crossed her of what she had thought then their married life would be; what it might have been, ay, and what even after they had settled at Ditchley she had tried hard to make it. For how little their loss of fortune would have harmed them, had Mr. Scanlan only

been content with such things as he had—had they rejoiced over their daily blessings, and been patient with their inevitable cares! How much wiser if, instead of pestering Providence like angry creditors for what they fancied their due, they had accepted His gifts like dear children, believing in the Father who loved even while He denied.

This faith, which I conclude Mr. Scanlan taught, like most clergymen, in the letter of his sermons, was now the only rag of religion left in Josephine. Doctrines which her husband with his other Evangelical brethren was very strong in, she did not believe in one whit; or rather she never considered whether they were true or false. They had been dinued into her with such weary iteration, preached at her on all occasions,—only preached, not practised—that now she let them alone; they went in at one ear and out at the other. She did not actually loathe them; mercifully, Christianity is so divine, that all pure souls instinctively accept it and cling to it, in spite of the corruptions of

its followers ; but she ignored them as much as she could, and taught as little as possible of them to her children. But at every step she was stopped ; even at the Lord's Prayer, when her youngest child, to whom she tried to explain why he was to call God "Our Father," and what a father was, horrified her by the simple question, "Is God anything like papa?"

Poor mother ! Poor children ! And they had all "souls to be saved," as Mr. Scanlan would have put it. But happily he did not perplex himself much about the souls of his own family ; he took it for granted that, being his family, they were all right, when in truth they were in a spirit of sceptical contempt worse than the blackest heathenism. It required many years and many sorrows to bring Josephine Scanlan to the light ; and her children, save perhaps Adrienne, died without seeing it, or recognising in "the Gospel" anything beyond a cant phrase, which meant nothing, or worse than nothing. "No wonder !" said Bridget one day to me, unconscious of the bitter

satire of her words. "You see, Miss, their papa was a clergyman."

Fiercely and fast, thinking as little as possible of how she should word her errand, and nerving herself for disappointment, as if it were her usual lot, Mrs. Scanlan walked through the Rectory garden to the front door. It stood wide open, though the day was cold, and up and down the usually silent house were sounds of many feet. Nevertheless, she rang several times before the bell was answered. Then appeared some under-servant, with a frightened face, by which Josephine perceived that something was terribly wrong.

"What has happened—your master?" and a sudden constriction of the heart made her stop. She felt almost as if her thoughts had murdered him.

No, Mr. Oldham was not dead. Worse than dead, almost, for his own sake and others. He had gone to his study, desiring he might not be disturbed till lunch-time, as he had "business." At one o'clock the butler went in and found

him lying on the floor, alive and sensible, but speechless and motionless. How long he had lain there, or what had brought on the fit, no one knew, or was ever likely to know. For Dr. Waters, who had been fetched at once, said it was very unlikely he would ever speak again. The paralysis which had struck him was of that saddest kind, which affects the body, not the mind; at least, not at first. Poor Mr. Oldham would be, for the rest of his days, whether few or many, little better than a living corpse, retaining still the imprisoned but conscious soul.

“Oh! doctor, this is terrible! Is there no hope?”

Dr. Waters, coming down the staircase, wrung Mrs. Scanlan's hands, but replied nothing. He was much affected himself, and so was Mr. Langhorne, the Rector's man of business, who followed him. The two old gentlemen—old, though still much younger than Mr. Oldham—were noted as very great “chums,” and the two honestest and best men in all Ditchley,

even though, as satirical people sometimes said, one was a doctor and the other a lawyer. They stood talking together mournfully, evidently consulting over this sad conjuncture of affairs.

“Yes, I have been putting seals upon all his papers,” said Mr. Langhorne. “It is the only thing to be done until—until further change. There is nobody to take any authority here: he has no relations.”

“Except Lady Emma, and she is abroad: I do not know where. Perhaps Mrs. Scanlan does.”

Dr. Waters turned to her, as she stood aloof, feeling herself one too many in this house of grief, and as if she had no right there. And yet she felt the grief as deeply as any one; more so, perhaps, because it was not unmixed with remorse. Kind, good Mr. Oldham!—why had she neglected him of late—why suffered her foolish pride, her ridiculous sensitiveness, to come between her and him? How she wished she had put both aside, and shown fearlessly

to the lonely old man what a tender and truly filial heart she bore towards him !

“I know nothing about Lady Emma,” said she, forgetting how she had come to ask that very question, and how serious it was for herself that it could not be answered. Her own affairs had drifted away from her mind. “Only tell me, will he ever recover, ever speak again ?”

“I fear not ; though he may lie in his present state for months, and even years ; I have known such cases. Why do you ask ? Did you come to speak to him about business ? I hope all is right between your husband and him ?”

Mrs. Scanlan bent her head assentingly.

“That is well. I was half afraid they had had some little difficulties of late. And now Mr. Scanlan will have the whole duty on his hands, and Langhorne and I, as church-wardens, ought to make our arrangements accordingly.”

So they both fell into business talk, as men do fall, even after such a catastrophe as this,

though it seemed shocking enough to the woman who, with her woman's heart full, stood and listened. No one interfered with her. As the Curate's wife, she had a certain right to be in the house. No other right did she for a moment venture to urge. She only sat and listened.

Shortly, she caught a sentence which startled her.

"He will never be capable of business again, that is quite certain," said the doctor. "I do hope he has made his will."

"Hem—I believe, I have some reason to suppose he has," replied the cautious lawyer. "But these things are of course strictly private."

"Certainly, certainly ; I only asked, because he once said he intended to make me his executor. But he might do that without telling me ; and I shall find it out soon enough when all is over."

"All over," that strange periphrasis out of the many by which people like to escape the blank plain word—death! Mrs. Scanlan listened

—she could not keep herself from listening—with an eagerness that, when she caught the eyes of the two old men, made her blush crimson, like a guilty person.

But the doctor's mind was preoccupied, and the lawyer apparently either knew nothing, or else—and this thought smote Josephine with a cold fear—there was nothing to be known. Mr. Oldham might long ago have burnt his will, and made another. Her future, and that of her children, hung on a mere thread.

The suspense was so dreadful, the conflict in her conscience so severe, that she could not stand it.

“I think,” she said, “since I can do no good here, I had better go home. Shall I write to Lady Emma? But in any case I want her address for myself; will Mr. Langhorne look in Mr. Oldham's address-book for it?”

This was easily done, the old Rector being so accurate and methodical in all his habits. But the result of the search stopped any hope of applying to Lady Emma, even if, under the

circumstances, Mrs. Scanlan could have made up her mind to apply. The address was "Poste restante, Vienna."

But Josephine scarcely felt that last shock. All she said was, "Very well; she is too far off for me to write to her. I will go home."

But she had hardly got through the Rectory garden when Mr. Langhorne overtook her.

The good lawyer was a very shy man. He had raised himself from the ranks, and still found his humble origin, his *gauche* manners, and a most painful stammer he had, stood a good deal in his way. But he was a very honest and upright fellow; and though she had seldom met him in society, Mrs. Scanlan was well aware how highly Mr. Oldham and all his other neighbours respected him, and how in that cobwebby little office of his lay hidden half the secrets of half the families within ten miles round Ditchley.

He came up to her hesitatingly. "Excuse me, ma'am; taking great liberty, I know; but if you had any affairs to transact with poor Mr.

Oldham, and I as his man of business could ass-ass-assist you——”

Here he became so nervous, and began stammering so frightfully, that Mrs. Scanlan had time to recover from her surprise, and collect her thoughts together. Her need was imminent. She must immediately consult somebody—and do it herself, for her husband was sure to escape the painful thing if possible. Why should she not consult this man, who was a clever man, a good man, and a lawyer besides? And, after all, Mr. Scanlan’s misfortune was only a misfortune, no disgrace. He had done a very foolish thing, but nothing really wrong.

So she took courage and accepted Mr. Langhorne’s civility, so far as to communicate to him her present strait; why she had wished to write to Lady Emma; and why, even if there were no other reason, the uncertainty of the lady’s movements made it impracticable. Yet she could see no other way out of this crisis, and her need was imperative.

“Otherwise,” she said, with a sort of bitter

pride, "believe me, I never should have communicated my husband's private affairs in this way."

"They would not have been private much longer, madam," said the lawyer, seeming to take in the case at a glance, and to treat it as a mere matter of business, happening every day. "You have no time to lose; Mr. Scanlan must at once pay the money, or the law will take its course. Shall I advance him the sum? Has he any security to give me?"

He had none; except his personal promise to pay, which his wife well knew was not worth a straw. But she could not say so.

"I had rather," she replied, "be quit of debt entirely, in the way I planned. Will you buy my jewels instead of Lady Emma? They are worth more than two hundred pounds. You could easily sell them, or if you would keep them for me, I might be able to repurchase them."

Poor soul! she was growing cunning. As she spoke she keenly investigated the lawyer's

face, to find out whether he thought—had any cause to think—she should ever be rich enough to repurchase them. But Mr. Langhorne's visage was impenetrable.

“As you will,” he said; “it makes no difference to me; I only wished to oblige a neighbour and a friend of Mr. Oldham's. Will your husband come to me to-morrow? Or yourself? Perhaps you had better come yourself.”

“Yes, if you desire it; as my husband will be much engaged.”

“And take my advice, Mrs. Scanlan—say nothing in Ditchley about this matter of the bill. As we lawyers know, such things are best kept as quiet as possible. Good afternoon.”

Kind as he was, the old man's manner was a little patronizing, a little dictatorial; but Josephine did not care for that. Her distress was removed, for she had no doubt of getting her husband to agree to this arrangement: so as he had the money, it mattered little

to him how it was obtained. She hastened home, and met Mr. Scanlan at the gate. He was coming from an opposite quarter, and evidently quite ignorant of all that had happened at the Rectory.

“Well!” he said eagerly, “have you got me the money?” having apparently quite forgotten how she had meant to get it. “Are things all right?”

“Yes, I have arranged it. But——”

And then she told him the terrible blow which had fallen upon poor Mr. Oldham.

“Good heavens! what a dreadful thing to happen! If I had thought it would have happened—— But I had no idea he was ill, I assure you I had not.”

“Did you see him, then, this morning?”

The news affected Mr. Scanlan more than his wife had expected; seeing he always took other people's misfortunes and griefs so lightly. He staggered, and turned very pale.

Nobody seeming to know of her husband's

having been at the Rectory, she concluded he had not gone there ; it was no new thing for Edward Scanlan to fail in an appointment, particularly one that he suspected might not be altogether pleasant.

“Yes, I saw him ; he let me into the house himself. He had been on the look-out for me to give me a lecture ; which he did ; for one whole hour, and very much he irritated me. Indeed, we both of us lost our tempers, I fear.”

“Edward ! The doctor said some agitation must have caused this ; surely, surely——”

“It is no use worrying me, Josephine ; what is done is done, and can’t be avoided. I don’t deny we had some hot words, which I am very sorry for now ; but how on earth was I to know he was ill ? You can’t blame me ?”

Yet he seemed conscious of being to blame, for he exculpated himself with nervous eagerness.

“I do assure you, my dear, I was patient with him as long as ever I could, and it was difficult, for somehow he had found out about the bill,

and he was very furious. He said my conduct was ‘unworthy a gentleman and a clergyman,’ that I should ruin you and the children, and similar nonsense; declaring if such a thing ever happened again, he would do—something or other, I can’t tell what, for he began to mumble in his speech, and then——”

“And then? Oh, husband! for once in your life tell me exactly the truth, and the whole truth.”

“I will—only you need not imply that I am a story-teller. Don’t lose your temper, Josephine; you sometimes do. Well, Mr. Oldham lost his; he grew red and furious, and then his words got confused: I thought he was only in a passion, and that I had better leave him to himself; so I went away quietly—I declare quite quietly—slipped out of the room, in short, for somebody might hear us, and that would have been so awkward.”

“And you noticed nothing more?”

“Well, yes; I think—I am not sure—but I think, as I shut the study-door there was a noise

—some sort of a fall—but I could not go back, you know, and I did not like to call the servants; they might have found out we had been quarrelling.”

“They might have found out you had been quarrelling,” repeated Josephine, slowly, with a strange contempt in her tone. “And this was, when?”

“About eleven, I fancy.”

“And he lay on the floor till one!—lay helpless and speechless, not a creature coming near him. Poor old man! And you let him lie. It was your doing. You——”

“Coward” was the word upon her lips; but happily she had enough sense of duty left not to utter it. She left him to hear it from the voice of his own conscience. And he did hear it, for he had a conscience, poor weak soul that he was. He could not keep from sinning; yet when he had sinned he always knew it. This was what made dealing with him so very difficult. His pitiful contrition almost disarmed reproach.

“Josephine, if you look at me like that, I shall almost feel as if I had killed him. Poor Mr. Oldham ! who would have thought it ! And I know you think it is all my fault. You are cruel to me, very cruel. You that are so tender to the children—to everybody—are as hard as a stone to your own husband.”

Was that true ? Her conscience in turn half accused her of it. She tried to put on an encouraging smile, entreating him not to get such fancies into his head, but to make the best of things. In vain ! He threw himself on the sofa in such a paroxysm of distress and self-reproach that it took all his wife’s efforts to quiet him, and prevent him from betraying himself to the household. And she felt, as much as he, that nothing must be betrayed. No one must know the part which he had had in causing this attack of Mr. Oldham’s. That he had caused it was clear enough ; one of those unfortunate fatalities which sometimes occur, making one dread inexpressibly ever to do an unkind thing,

or delay doing a kind one, since, in common phraseology, "one never knows what may happen."

In this case, what had happened was irretrievable. To publish it abroad would be worse than useless, and might seriously injure Mr. Scanlan; just now especially, when so much additional responsibility would fall upon him. Far better that this fact—which nobody at Ditchley knew—of his interview with the Rector, should be kept among those sad secrets of which every life is more or less full.

So Josephine reasoned with her husband, and soothed him as she best could. Only soothed him; for it was hopeless to attempt more. To rouse him into courage—to stimulate him into active goodness, for the pure love of goodness, had long since become to her a vain hope. Powerless to spur him on to right, all she could do was to keep him from wrong—to save him from harming himself or others.

"Edward," she said, taking his hand, and re-

garding him with a mournful pity, "I cannot let you talk any more in this strain; it does no good, and only agitates and wears you out. What has happened we cannot alter; we must only do our best for the future. Remember to-morrow was his Sunday for preaching—ah, poor Mr. Oldham!—and you have no sermon prepared; you must begin it at once."

This changed the current of the Curate's thoughts, always easily enough diverted. He caught at the idea at once, and saw, too, what an admirable opportunity this was for one of his displays of oratory in the pathetic line. He brightened up immediately.

"To be sure, I must prepare my sermon; and it ought to be a specially good one. For after what has occurred half the neighbourhood will come to Ditchley church to-morrow, and, of course, they will expect me to refer to the melancholy event."

Josephine turned away sick at heart.

"Oh! Edward, do not mention it; or, if you

must, say as little about it as possible."

But she knew her words were idle, her husband being one of those clever men who always make capital out of their calamities. So, after sitting up half the night to compose his discourse—indeed, he partly wrote it, for there had crept into the parish of late a slightly High Church element which objected to extempore sermons; which element, while abusing it roundly, the Curate nevertheless a little succumbed to—he woke his wife about two in the morning to read her the principal passages in the sermon, which he delivered afterwards with great success, and much to the admiration of his congregation. His text was, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," and his pictures of all kinds of terrible accidents and unforeseen misfortunes were most edifying, thrilling Ditchley with horror, or moving it with pathos. He ended by reverting to their beloved Rector and his sudden and sad illness; which he did in a manner so tender, so affecting, that there was

scarcely a dry eye in the church. Except one ; and that, I am much afraid, was Mrs. Scanlan's.

CHAPTER X.

THERE is a proverb which sometimes seems amazingly true, that “heaven takes care of fools and drunkards.” Can it be for their own sake, or is it out of pity for those belonging to them, to whom they serve as a sort of permanent discipline—the horsehair shirt and nightly scourge which are supposed to contribute to the manufacture of saints? And it is one of the most mysterious lessons of life, that such often is the case; that out of the wickedness of one-half of the world is evolved the noble self-devotedness of the other half. Why this should be, we know not, and sometimes in our ignorance it makes us very angry; but so it is, and we cannot help seeing it.

Of a truth, whether he himself thought so or not, Providence had all his life taken pretty good

care of Edward Scanlan. His "good luck" followed him still. When, on Mr. Oldham's private affairs being laid open to his lawyer and doctor—who were also, fortunately, the two churchwardens of the parish—it was discovered that the Rector had been paying his curate for salary the whole amount of the small living of Ditchley—still no objections were raised. His was considered so very peculiar a case, that the labourer was found worthy of his hire, and it was cheerfully continued to him. Arrangements were made whereby the curate should take the entire duty of the parish, until, at Mr. Oldham's death, the living should fall in; when, as the patronage of it happened by a curious chance to belong to Lady Emma's husband, Mr. Lascelles, there was exceeding probability of its being bestowed upon Mr. Scanlan. At least, so said Dr. Waters confidentially to Mrs. Scanlan, and she listened silently, with that nervous, pained expression which always came upon her anxious face when people talked to her about her future or her children's.

But for the present things went smoothly enough both with her and them; more so than for a long time. Impelled by his wife's influence, grateful for the ease with which she had got him out of his money-difficulty, and never reproached him with it, or else touched by some conscience-stings of his own concerning Mr. Oldham, at the time of the Rector's illness Mr. Scanlan behaved so well, was so active, so sympathetic, so kind, that the whole parish was loud in his praise. His sinking popularity rose to its pristine level. All the world was amiably disposed towards him, and towards his hard-worked, uncomplaining wife. In the general opening-up of things, people found out Mrs. Scanlan's private relations with Priscilla Nunn. The ladies of her acquaintance, who had worn her mended lace, and bought her beautiful muslin embroidery, so far from looking down upon her, rather honoured her for it; and, with the warm, good heart of country gentlewomen, patronized Priscilla's shop, till Mrs. Scanlan had more work than she could do.

Also, when another secret mysteriously came to light, probably through the Curate's own garrulousness, and it was whispered abroad that Mr. Scanlan had greatly hampered himself by going surety for a friend—a most talented, amiable, but temporarily unfortunate friend (which was the poetical version that reached Wren's Nest)—the sympathy of these dear innocent country people rose to such a height, that when somebody proposed subscribing a purse as a delicate testimony of their respect for their curate, it was soon filled to the amount of sixty pounds. Thereto was added a gown and cassock, a Bible and Prayer-Book—all of which were presented to Mr. Scanlan with great *éclat*. And he acknowledged the gift in an address so long and effective that, yielding to general entreaty, he had it printed—at his own expense, of course—and distributed gratis throughout the county.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Scanlan sat at home at Wren's Nest, sewing at her lace and embroidery more diligently than ever, for it was not unne-

cessary. All these glories without doors did not provide any additional comforts within—at least, none that were perceptible—so great was the increase of expenses. Dazzled by the excitement of his new position, his vanity tickled, his sense of importance increased by being now “monarch of all he surveyed” in the large and increasing parish of Ditchley, Mr. Scanlan launched out more and more every day, and was every day less amenable to his wife’s gentle reasonings. Not that he openly contradicted her: indeed, when differences occurred, he continually allowed that her way was the right way; but he never followed it, and never lacked excuses for not following it;—the good of the parish, the good of the family, his position as a clergyman, and so on. He was not honest enough to say he did a thing because he *liked* to do it, but always found some roundabout reason why it was advisable to do it: at which, finally, Josephine only came to smile without replying one single word. Women

learn in time, out of sheer hopelessness, these melancholy hypocrisies.

Meanwhile the Curate's money "burnt a hole in his pocket," as Bridget expressed it—a bigger hole every day; and had it not been for his wife's earnings, the family must often have run very short—the family which, besides the younger four, comprised now a great tall youth, almost a young man, and a girl, small and pale, plain and uninteresting—but yet a growing-up maiden, on the verge of womanhood—more of a woman, in precocity of heart and feeling, than many of the young ladies of Ditchley now "come out," and even engaged to be married. But there was no coming out, and no sweet love episode for poor little Adrienne. Her mother, looking at her, felt sure she would be an old maid, and was glad she saw no one she was likely to care for, so as to wound her tender heart with any unfortunate attachment; for the child was of an imaginative nature, just one of those girls who are apt to fall in love—innocently as hopelessly; and never get over it as

long as they live. So, if she ever thought of the matter at all, Josephine was thankful that her girl, shut up in her quiet obscurity, was safe so far.

César was different. About him she had no end of anxieties. He was a manly, precocious boy; full of fun, keen in his enjoyment of life; rough a little, though his innate gentlemanhood kept him from ever being coarse. Still, in spite of her care, his frank, free, boyish nature inclined him to be social, and he caught the tone of his associates. He was growing up to manhood with a strong provincial accent, and a *gauche* provincial manner, much more like the shop-boys, bankers' clerks, and lawyers' apprentices of Ditchley, than the last descendant of the long race of De Bougainville.

It might have been a weakness, but she clung to it still—this poor woman, to whom the glories of her ancestry were now a mere dream—her love of the noble line which had upheld for centuries that purest creed of aristocracy—that “all the sons were brave, and all the

daughters virtuous." Now, indeed, it was little more than a fairy tale, which she told to her own sons and daughters in the vague hope of keeping alive in them the true spirit of nobility which had so shone out in their forefathers. Nevertheless, she felt bitterly how circumstances were dead against her poor children, and how it would be almost a miracle if she could keep their heads above water, and bring them up to be anything like gentlemen and gentlewomen.

Her husband seemed very indifferent to the matter. Indeed, after listening for some time, very impatiently, to her arguments, that they should make some sacrifice in order to send César to college, he negatived the whole question. It did not affect him personally, and therefore assumed but small dimensions in his mind. He seldom saw César except on Sundays, when it rather annoyed him to have such a big fellow, taller than himself, calling him father. As he said one day to Josephine, "it made one look so old."

And all this while the poor old Rector lay in

his shut-up room, or was dragged slowly up and down the paths of his pretty garden, a melancholy spectacle, which gradually the people about him and his sympathising parishioners grew so accustomed to that it ceased to affect them. Satisfied that he had every alleviation of his condition that wealth could supply, they left him to be taken care of by his faithful old servants until should come the happy release: at first looked forward to continually, but gradually becoming less imminent. Even Lady Emma—his most affectionate and nearest friend, though only a distant cousin—after coming from Vienna to Ditchley, and staying a few days, returned, scarcely expecting to see him alive again. Yet he lingered—one year—a year and a half, in much the same state, partially conscious, it was supposed, but able neither to speak nor to move. He ate, drank, and slept, however,—passively, but peacefully as a child: his eyes were often as sharp and as bright as ever, and the workings of his countenance showed considerable intelligence, but

otherwise his life was a total blank. Death itself seemed to have forgotten him.

Mrs. Scanlan went to see him every Sunday—her leisure day, and her husband's busiest one, which fact made less apparent the inevitable necessity which she soon discovered, that she must pay her visits alone. From the first appearance of his curate at the Rector's bedside, Mr. Oldham had testified so strong a repugnance to his company, that it was necessary to invent all sorts of excuses—thankfully enough received by Mr. Scanlan—to keep him away. And so the formal visits of condolence and sick-room prayers—spiritual attentions which Mr. Scanlan paid, because he thought people would expect him to pay, to his rector, were tacitly set aside, or took place only at the longest intervals that were consistent with appearances.

However, in all societies he testified the utmost feeling, assured the parishioners that his “dear and excellent friend” was quite “prepared.” Once, when this question was put to Mrs. Scanlan, she was heard to answer “that if

not prepared already, she thought it was rather late to begin preparations for death now ; and that for her part she considered living was quite as important, and as difficult, as dying." Which remark was set down as one of the "extraordinary" things Mrs. Scanlan sometimes said—confirming the doubt whether she was quite the pleasant person that she used to be.

Her pleasantness—such as it was—she kept for Mr. Oldham's sick chamber ; where the old man lay in his sad life-in-death, all day long. He was very patient, ordinarily : suffered no pain : and perhaps his long, lonely life made him more submissive to that perpetual solitude, which for him had begun even before the imprisonment of the grave. He seemed always glad to see Mrs. Scanlan. She talked to him, though not much—it was such a mournful monologue to carry on—still, he would look interested, and nod his head, and try to mumble out his uncertain words in reply. She read to him, which he always enjoyed immensely. She, too ; since it was the first time for many

years that she had had leisure for reading, or considered it right to make for herself that leisure. But now she did it not for herself; and it was astonishing how many books she got through, and what a keen enjoyment she had of them. And sometimes she would simply bring her work and sit beside him, telling him anything which came into her head—the news of the parish, her children's doings and sayings; to which latter he always listened with pleasure; and she had now no hesitation in talking about them; whatever the future might be, it was settled by this time. Pride and delicacy were alike needless: the poor helpless old man could alter nothing now. So she lay passive on her oars and tided down with the stream. After Mr. Oldham's illness there came a season of unwonted peace for poor Mrs. Scanlan.

But it was a false peace—impossible to last very long.

There is another proverb—I fear I am fond of proverbs—“Set a beggar on horseback, and

he will ride to the devil." Now, without likening Mr. Scanlan to a beggar, or accusing him of that dangerous equestrian exercise, there is no doubt he was one of the many men who are much safer walking on foot. That is, too great liberty was not good for him. He did better as the poor curate—limited by his prescribed line of duties, and steadied by the balance-weight of his sagacious old rector,—than when he was left to himself, responsible to nobody, and with the whole parish on his hands. He was not a good man of business, being neither accurate nor methodical. Clever he might be; but a clever man is not necessarily a wise man. Ere long, he began doing a good many foolish things.

Especially with reference to one favourite hatred he had—Puseyism, as it began to be called. A clergyman with these proclivities had settled in the next parish, and attempted various innovations—quire-singing, altar-decorating, daily services—which had greatly attracted the youth of Ditchley. They ran after

the High Church vicar, just as once their predecessors had run after the young Evangelical curate, which the old Evangelical curate did not like at all.

Mr. Scanlan's congregation fell from him, which irritated his small vanity to the last degree. He tried various expedients to lure them back—a new organ, a Dorcas society, a fancy bazaar—all those religious dissipations which often succeed so well in a country community which happens to have plenty of money and nothing to do—but the errant sheep would not be recalled. At length, maddened by his rival's successes, and by the beautiful new church that was being built for him, a brilliant thought struck Mr. Scanlan that he would try building too. The old school-house, coeval with the parish church of Ditchley, wanted repairs sadly. He proposed to pull it down and erect a new one, of commodious size and Gothic design, a great deal finer and more expensive than the obnoxious church.

This idea restored all his old animation and

sanguine energy. He brought down an architect from London, and went round the parish with him, plan in hand, collecting subscriptions. And Ditchley, still keeping up its old spirit of generosity, these came in so fast that a goodly sum was soon laid up in the Ditchley bank, in the combined names of the architect and the treasurer, who was, of course, the Reverend Edward Scanlan. A very simple transaction, which nobody inquired into; and even Mrs. Scanlan was scarcely cognizant of the fact. Indeed, her husband had rather kept her in the dark as to the whole matter; it pleased him to do it all himself, and to say with a superior air that "women knew nothing of business."

But presently, top-heavy with his success, he became a little difficult to deal with at home, and prone to get into petty squabbles abroad—womanish squabbles, if I may malign my sex by using the adjective. But I have seen as much spite, as much smallness, among men, as among any women, only they were men who had lost all true manliness by becoming conceited ego-

tists, wrapped up in self, and blind to any merit save their own. When these happen to be fathers of families, how the domestic barque is ever guided with such a steersman at the helm, God knows ! Nothing saves it from utter shipwreck, unless another hand quietly takes the rudder, and, strong in woman's invisible strength, though with streaming eyes and bleeding heart, steers the vessel on.

So had done, or had tried to do, against many cross-currents and dangerous shoals, poor Josephine Scanlan. But now her difficulties increased so much that sometimes her numbed hand almost failed in its task ; the very stars grew dim above her ; everything seemed wrapped in a dim fog, and she herself as far from land as ever.

Hitherto, though, as before hinted, Mr. Scanlan had hung up his fiddle at his own door, he had always played satisfactorily at his neighbours'. But now he did not get on quite so well with them as formerly. There broke out in him a certain quarrelsomeness, supposed by Saxons

to be a peculiarly Hibernian quality, and perhaps it is, with the lowest type of Irish character. He was always getting into hot water, and apparently enjoying the bath, as if it washed away a dormant irritability, which his wife had never noticed in him before. Now she did, and wondered at it a little, till she grew accustomed to it, as to many other faults in him, which, like notches in the bark of a tree, grew larger and uglier year by year.

So large, that the children themselves noticed them. It was useless to keep up the high ideal of paternal perfection, which is the salvation of a family; the blessed doctrine that the father can do no wrong; that he must be obeyed, because he would never exact any obedience that was not for the child's good; must be loved, because he loves so dearly every member of his household. Indeed, these young people sharply criticised, secretly or openly, their father's motives and actions, and continually made out of them excuses for their own shortcomings: "Oh! Papa says so-and-so, and nobody blames

him;" "Papa told me to do such and such things, so of course I must do them;" until Mrs. Scanlan was almost driven wild by the divided duty of wife and mother,—a position so maddening that I should think a woman could hardly keep her senses in it, save by steadily fixing her eyes upwards, on a higher duty than either, that which she owes to her God. But, for many a year, He who reveals himself by the title of "the Father," and the promise "I will be a husband unto you," had veiled Himself from her in the clouds and darkness generated by her mortal lot, which was such a daily mockery of both these names.

She herself was cruelly conscious how much she was changed, and how rapidly changing; growing callous to pain, indifferent to pleasure, even that of her children; neglectful of her appearance and theirs; allowing her household to sink into those untidy ways, so abhorrent to inbred refinement, which mark the last despondency of poverty. The bright energy with which she used to preach to Bridget and the children

on the subject of clean faces and clothes ; order, neatness, and prettiness—since no narrowness of means warranted a family in living in a daily muddle, like pigs in a sty—all this was quite gone. She rarely complained and never scolded. Towards her husband, above all, she was falling into that passive state of indifference, sadder than either grief or anger. She took little interest in his affairs, and seldom asked him any questions about them. Where was the use of it, when she could place no reliance on his answers ?

Oftentimes, with a bitter joy, she thought how much wiser Mr. Oldham had been than she in pledging her to keep the secret ; and how well it was that she still retained it ; if, indeed, there were any secret to retain. That, until the Rector's death, she could not possibly discover. He must have made his will, but in whose possession it was, or whether anybody was aware of its contents, she knew no more than that often-appealed-to personage, the man in the moon ; who seemed to have as much influence

over her destiny as anything else, or anybody either, in heaven or earth. She felt herself drifting along in blind chance, not knowing from day to day what would happen, or what she ought to do.

Often, when returning home from her evening visits to Mr. Oldham, she wished she had never heard from him one word about his money or its destination,—that she had struggled on patiently, as a poor curate's wife, and made her boys little butchers or bakers, and her girls milliners or school teachers, to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of their brow.

Then again, in her passionate ambition for them, she felt that to realize this fortune, to give them all they wanted, and make them all she desired them to be, she would have "sold her soul to the devil," had that personage appeared to her, as he did to Dr. Faustus and other tempted souls. She could understand thoroughly the old wives' tales about persons bewitched or possessed: sometimes she felt Satan almost as near to her as if he had started

out of a bush on the twilight common, and confronted her in the visible likeness of the Prince of the power of the air,—hoofs, horns, tail, and all.

Thus time went on, and it was already two years since Mr. Oldham's attack; yet still no kind angel of death had appeared to break with merciful touch his fetters of flesh, and lift him, a happy new-born soul, out of this dreary world into the world everlasting. And still to the much-tried mother remained unsolved the mystery of life, more difficult, as she had once truly said, than dying: and she knew not from week to week either what she ought to do, or how she should do it—above all, with regard to her children.

They were growing up fast: César being now a tall youth of sixteen—very handsome: with the high aquiline features and large-limbed frame of his Norman ancestors: not clever exactly,—Louis was the clever one among the boys,—but sensible, clear-headed, warm-hearted: with a keen sense of right and wrong—

which he acted upon in a somewhat hard and fierce fashion, not uncommon in youth. But in this his mother rather encouraged than condemned him. Any harshness of principle was better to her than that fatal laxity which had been, and continued to be, the bane of her domestic life.

César and his father were cast in such a totally opposite mould, that, as years advanced, they naturally divided further and further. Both were very much out of the house, and, when they met within it, they kept a polite neutrality. Still sometimes domestic jars occurred; and one great source of irritation was the father's extreme anxiety that his son's school-days should end, and he should begin to earn his own living. Of course, as he reasoned, a poor curate's sons could not expect their father to do more than give them a respectable education. The rest they must do for themselves.

"Yes," their mother would say, when the question was argued, and say no more—how

could she?—Only she contrived to stave off the evil day as long as possible : and keep César steadily at his studies in the grammar-school, which was a very good school in its way, till something turned up.

At last, unfortunately, something did turn up. Mr. Scanlan came home one night in high satisfaction ; the manager of Ditchley bank having offered to take César as junior clerk with a salary of a few shillings a week.

Josephine stood aghast. Not that she objected to her boy's earning his living, but she wished him first to get an education that would fit him for doing it, thoroughly and well, and make him equal for any chances of the future, particularly that future to which she still clung, as, at least, a possibility. But here, as on every hand, she was stopped by her sore secret.

"It is a kind offer," said she hesitatingly, "and perhaps we may think of it when—when the boy has quite finished his education——"

"Finished his education ! What more edu-

cation can he get? You surely don't keep up that silly notion of his going to college? Why, that is only for lads whose parents are wealthy, —heirs to estates, and so on."

"What does my boy say himself about the matter? He is old enough to have a voice in his own future."

And Josephine turned to her son, who stood sullen and silent.

"No; children should never decide for themselves," said Mr. Scanlan harshly. "You are talking, my dear wife, as if we were people of property, when in our circumstances the principal object ought to be to get the boys off our hands as quickly as possible."

"Get our boys off our hands!"

"Exactly; let them maintain themselves and cease to be a burthen on their father. Why, that big fellow there eats as much as a man, and his tailor's bill is nearly as heavy as my own. I should be only too glad to see him paying it himself."

"So should I, father," said the boy bitterly.

“Then why don’t you jump at once at the chance, and say you will go to the Bank?”

“Do you wish to go? Answer honestly, my son. Would you like to be a bank clerk?”

“No, mother, I shouldn’t,” said César sturdily. “And what’s more—as I told Papa, while we were walking home—I won’t be one, and nobody shall make me.”

“I’ll make you!” cried Mr. Scanlan furiously.

César curled his lip a little—

“I think, father, if I were you I wouldn’t attempt to try.”

There was nothing disrespectful in the boy’s manner; if it expressed anything, it was simple indifference. César evidently did not think it worth while to quarrel with his father; and, tamed by the perfectly courteous tone, and perhaps scarcely hearing the words, the father seemed to hesitate at quarrelling with his son.

They stood face to face, César leaning over his mother’s chair, and she clasping secretly, with a nervous warning clasp, the hand which

he had laid upon her shoulder. A father and son more unlike each other could hardly be. Such differences nature does make, and often the very circumstances of education and early association that would seem to create similarity, prevent it. One extreme produces another.

“César,” whispered his mother, “you must not speak in that way to Papa and me. Tell us plainly what you desire, and we will do our best to accomplish it.”

“Papa knows my mind. I told it to him this evening,” said the boy carelessly. “I’m ready to earn my living: but I won’t earn it among those snobs in the Ditchley bank.”

“How snobs? They are all the sons of respectable people, and very gentlemanly-looking young fellows,” said the father. “Quite as well-dressed as you.”

“Very likely; I don’t care much for my clothes. But I do care for having to do with gentlemen; and they’re not gentlemen. Mamma wouldn’t think they were.”

“Why not?”

“They drink; they smoke; they swear; they idle about and play billiards. I don’t like them, and I won’t be mixed up with them. Find me something else, some honest, hard work, and I’ll do it; but that I won’t do, and so I told you.”

And César, drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his honest eyes—his mother’s eyes—full on “the author of his being,” as poets and moralists would say—implying in that fact a claim to every duty, every sacrifice. True enough when the author of a child’s existence has likewise been the origin of everything that ennobles, and brightens, and makes existence valuable. Not otherwise.

“My son,” said his mother, anxiously interfering, “how comes it that you know so much about these clerks at the Bank? You have never been there?”

“Oh! yes, I have; many times, on Papa’s messages.”

“What messages?”

César hesitated.

“I meant to have told you, my dear,” said his father, hastily, “only it concerned a matter in which you take so little interest. And it is quite separate from your bank account—and you know I am very glad you should draw and cash all our cheques yourself, because then you know exactly how the money goes.”

“What does all this mean?” said Mrs. Scanlan, wearily—“money, money—nothing but money. I am sick of the very sound of the word.”

“So am I too, my dearest wife—and therefore I never mention it. These were merely parish matters—money required in the school, which I have once or twice sent César to get for me.”

“Once or twice, father! Why, I have been to the bank every week these two months! I fetched out for you—one—two, let me see, it must be nearly two hundred and fifty pounds.”

“You are an excellent arithmetician; would have made your fortune as a banker,” said the

father; and patted his son on the shoulder in a conciliatory manner. "But do not bother your mother with all this. As I told you, she is a woman, and you and I are men:—we ought not to trouble her with any business matters."

"No, I'll never trouble her more than I can help," said the boy fondly. "But indeed, mamma asked me a direct question, and to put her off would have been as bad as telling her a lie."

"Yes, my son," said Josephine, with a gasp, almost of agony. How was she ever to steer her course? How keep this lad in the right way—the straight and narrow road—while his father——

Mr. Scanlan looked exceedingly uncomfortable. He avoided the countenances of both wife and son. He began talking rapidly and inconsequently—about the school-building and the responsibility it was—and the great deal he had to do, with nobody to help him.

"For, my dear, as a clergyman's wife, you know you are no help to me whatever. You

never visit : you take no position in the parish : you inquire about nothing : you hear nothing."

"I shall be glad to hear," said Josephine, rousing herself, with a faint dread that she had let matters go too far, that there were things it would be advisable she should hear. "For instance, this money the boy spoke of—I suppose it was wanted for the school-house, to pay the architect or builder. Have you then nearly finished your building?"

"Why, the walls are so low I can jump over them still, as Remus did over the walls of Rome," said César, laughing, but his father turned away, scarlet with confusion.

"I won't be criticised and catechised, before my own son too," said he, angrily. "César ! go to bed at once."

The boy looked surprised, but still prepared to depart : kissed his mother, and said good-night to his father : politely, if not very affectionately :—Mr. Scanlan's fondling days with his children had been long done.

"Shall you want me to take that message to

Mr. Langhorne, father? I'm ready to fetch and carry as much as ever you like. Only I thought I heard you tell somebody that the money subscribed was untouched. What am I to say if he asks me about the £250 you had?"

César might not have meant it—probably, shrewd boy as he was, he did not as yet see half-way into the matter—but quite unconsciously he fixed upon his father those intense dark eyes, and the father cowered before them.

"Hold your tongue, you goose; what do you know about business?" said he, sharply: and then César woke up to another fact—to more facts than it was fitting a boy of his age should begin studying and reasoning upon; especially with regard to his own father.

As for the mother, she looked from one to the other of them—these two men; for César was fast growing into a man, with all manly qualities rapidly developing in mind as in body—looked and shivered: shivered down to the very core of her being. God had laid upon her the heaviest burthen He can lay upon a wo-

man. She had lived to see her husband stand self-convicted before the son she had borne to him.

Convicted—of what?

It was quite true she had taken little interest in this school-building: she hardly knew why, except that her interest in everything seemed to have died out very much of late: a dull passive indifference to life and all its duties had come over her. And Edward had so many projects which never resulted in anything. She did not believe this would, and thought little about it: indeed, the mere facts of it reached her more through her neighbours than her husband, who seemed very jealous of her interference in the matter. When his first enthusiasm had ceased, and the subscriptions were all collected and placed in the Bank, he gave up talking and thinking about it.

But now she must think and inquire too, for it had appeared before her suddenly, and in a new and alarming light. The money which Mr. Scanlan had drawn out, evidently not for busi-

ness purposes, whose money was it, and what had he done with it?

He had said truly that she managed all the household finances now. He left them to her, it was less trouble; and she had contrived to make ends meet—even including two journeys to London, which he said were necessary; and to which she consented more readily—seeing Mr. Summerhayes was not there. The artist had found England too hot to hold him, and disappeared permanently to Rome. No fear therefore of his further influence over that weak facile nature, with whom it was a mere chance which influence was uppermost. Except for one thing—and the wife thanked God all her days for that—Edward Scanlan's pleasures were never criminal. But what had he wanted that money for, and how had he spent it? Painful as the question was, she must ask it. To let such a thing go uninquired into might be most dangerous.

When her boy was gone, she sat silent, thinking how best she could arrive at the truth. For

it was always necessary to arrive at it by a sadly ingenious approximation ; the direct truth her husband had never told her in his life. Even now, he glanced at the door, as if on any excuse he would be glad to escape. But at eleven o'clock on a wet night even the most henpecked husband would scarcely wish to run away.

A henpecked husband ! How we jest over the word, and despise the man to whom we apply it. But do we ever consider what sort of a man he is, and must necessarily be ? A coward—since only a coward would be afraid of a woman, be she good or bad ; a domestic traitor and hypocrite, whose own weakness sinks him into what is perhaps his safest condition—that of a slave. If men knew how we women—all honest and womanly women—scorn slaves and worship heroes, they would blame not us but themselves, when they are “henpecked.”

Few men could have looked less like a hero, and more like a whipped hound—than Edward Scanlan at this moment.

"My dear," said he, rising and lighting his candle, "don't you think you had better go to bed? It is late enough."

"I could not sleep," she said irritably. She was often irritable now—inwardly at least, and sometimes it showed outside, for she was not exactly an "amiable" woman. There was a sound, healthy sweetness in her at the core, but she was like a fruit that has never been properly shone upon, never half-ripened; she set a man's teeth on edge sometimes, as she did just now. "How you can sleep, with that matter on your mind, I cannot imagine."

"What matter, my dear?"

"Edward," looking him full in the face, and trying a plan—a very piteous plan—of finding out the truth by letting him suppose she knew it already, "you have been doing, I fear, a very dangerous thing; drawing out for your own uses the money that was meant for your new school. When the architect or builder come to be paid, what shall you do? They will say you have stolen it."

This was putting the thing so plainly, and in such a brief, matter-of-fact way, that it quite startled Edward Scanlan. His look of intense surprise, and even horror, was in one sense almost a relief to his wife; it showed that, whatever he had done, it was with no deliberately guilty intention.

“Bless my life, Josephine, what are you talking about? If I have taken some of the money, I was obliged, for I ran so short in London, and I did not like to come to you for more, you would have scolded me so; if I did draw a hundred or so, of course I shall replace it before it is wanted. The accounts will not be balanced for three months yet.”

“And then?”

“Oh! by then something is sure to turn up. Please don’t bother me—I have been bothered enough. But, after all, if this was in your mind—one of the endless grudges you have against your husband—I am rather glad you have spoken out. Why didn’t you speak out

long ago? it would have made things much easier for me."

Easier, and for him! Ease, then, was all he thought of? The actual dishonesty he had committed, and its probable consequences, seemed to touch him no more than if he had been an ignorant child. To appeal to him in the matter of conscience was idle; he appeared to have no idea that he had done wrong.

But his wife realized doubly both the erring act and its inevitable results. Now, at last, she not merely trembled and rebelled, but stood literally aghast at the prospect before her, at the sort of man to whom her future was linked, whom she had so ignorantly made her husband and the father of her children. In marrying, how little do women consider this—and yet it is not wrong, but right to be considered. The father of their children—the man from whom their unborn darlings may inherit hereditary vices, and endure hereditary punishments—viewed in this light, I fear many a winning

lover would be turned—and righteously—from a righteous woman's door.

But it was too late now for Josephine: her lot had long been fixed. All that she could do was to exercise the only power she had over her husband to show him what he had done, and the danger of doing it; to terrify him, if no other means availed, into truthfulness and honesty.

“Edward,” said she, “nothing will make things easy for you. It is useless to disguise the plain fact. You cannot replace the money; you have none of your own wherewith to replace it. And if when the bills for the school-building fall due, it is found that you have made away with the money that was to pay them, your act will be called by a very ugly name—embezzlement.”

Poor Edward Scanlan almost started from his chair.

“You are joking—only joking! But it is a very cruel joke, to call your husband a thief and a scoundrel!”

“I did not call you so. I believe you would not steal—intentionally; and you are far too simple for a scoundrel. But everybody will not make that distinction. If a man uses for himself a sum of which he is only treasurer, and it is public money, the public considers it theft, and he will be tried for embezzlement.”

Her husband had sometimes called her “Themis,” and not unlike that stern goddess she looked, as she stood over the frightened man, growing more and more frightened every minute, for he knew his wife never spoke at random, or merely for effect, as he did.

“How can you say such things to me, Josephine? But I don’t believe them. They are not true.”

“Then ask Mr. Langhorne—ask any lawyer—any commonly honest man.”

“How dare I ask?”

“That proves the truth of my words. If you had done nothing wrong, you would dare.”

Her tone, so quiet and passionless, struck him with more dread than any storm of anger.

He felt convinced his wife was right. An overwhelming fear came over him.

“Suppose it were true, suppose I could not put this money back in time, and all were to come out, what would happen?”

“You would be sent to prison, tried, perhaps transported.”

“Oh, Josephine! And you can look at me and say such things—me, your own husband! Can’t you help me? Have you already forsaken me?”

Quite overwhelmed, he threw himself across her knees, like one of the children, and burst into a paroxysm of childish weeping.

Poor Josephine! What could she do? Only treat him as a child—her miserable husband: soothe him and caress him in a pitying, motherly sort of way, not attempting either reproaches or reasonings, for both were equally hopeless. Evidently, what he had done had never till now presented itself to him in its true aspect; and when it did do so, he was con-

founded by the sight. He lay, actually shaking with terror, muttering,

“I shall be sent to prison—I meant no harm, yet I shall be sent to prison. And I shall die there, I know I shall; and you will be left a widow—a widow, Josephine, do you hear?”—with many other puerile moans, which she listened to without heeding much.

Once or twice, with a sudden recoil of feeling, she looked keenly at him, to discern if possible how much of his agony of fear and contrition was real; or how much was contrition, and how much only fear.

Edward Scanlan was too weak to be a scoundrel, at least a deliberate one. But your unconscious sinners, perhaps, do the most harm after all, because you can use none of the ordinary weapons against them. You can defend yourself against a straightforward villain: but a man who cries “peccavi” to all you have to urge against him, who is ready to plead guilty to all the sins in the Decalogue, and com-

mit them again to-morrow ;—against such a one, what chance have you ?

Mrs. Scanlan had none. To-night it was useless to say another word ; it would be like striking a man that was down. All she could do was to calm her husband's violent agitation—to get him to bed as quickly as possible, and watch by him till he fell asleep, which he did soon enough, holding fast by his wife's hand.

Wretched wife ! forlorn mother ! Heaven and earth seemed leagued against her, as she sat for hours in that dull calm—alive to all which had happened, or might happen—yet bound by a temporary spell, which made it all unreal. She sat, the only creature awake in the house ; and scarcely stirred until dawn broke over those smooth, low hills, every outline of which she now knew so well—the hills behind which lay the invisible sea which rounded that smiling France whence her forefathers came.

“ Why, oh ! why was I ever born ! ” cried she, in her heart.

Ah! not here, not here in this dimly seen, imperfect life, must any of us expect to find the complete answer to that question.

CHAPTER XI.

IN spite of her long knowledge of her husband's character, Mrs. Scanlan had expected—blindly expected—that after last night he would wake up fully alive to his position, amenable to reason, and glad to be helped, even if he could not help himself. But no, he shirked it all.

He rose, after a good night's sleep, as if nothing were amiss, avoided every allusion to unpleasant things, and all chance of private conversation with his wife, ate a hearty breakfast, and then set off for a walk, taking César with him; evidently—this companionship of father and son being very unusual—in order to avoid César's talking with his mother at home.

When Josephine perceived this, her heart

hardened. The tenderness which had come over her during the heavy watches of the night, when she sat by the sleeping man, and tried to remember that he was her husband, and she must save him, if possible, from the result of his own folly—to call it by no worse name—this softness dried up; her spirit changed within her, and the plans she had formed, the sacrifices she had contemplated for his sake, seemed but wasted labour, love thrown away.

At dinner-time, Mr. Scanlan did not return, but César did, apparently of his own accord. He had not been to school, but had been occupied in delivering various notes for his father—"begging letters," he had overheard them called in one drawing-room, while waiting in the hall—and the proud lad had gone home burning with indignation, which he tried hard not to let his mother see.

"Why should papa 'beg?'" said he; "especially money—and I know it was money, for I had to pay it into the bank afterwards; several five-pound notes."

“They were probably for the school,” the mother said, and guessed at once that, by the common system of robbing Peter to pay Paul, which weak people are so apt to indulge in, her husband had been trying to replace his defalcations by collecting further subscriptions. She tried to find out what she could from her son; excusing herself secretly by the vital necessity there was that she should know the truth; but César was very uncommunicative. He had evidently been charged to say as little as he could of what he had done or where he had been, and, being a boy of honour, he kept faith, even though it cost him a sore struggle, for he was passionately fond of his mother. At last he said plainly, “Please don’t question me. If you want to know anything, ask papa,” and stole out of the house.

Then a great fear came over Josephine, a fear which only women and mothers who feel their awful responsibility towards the young souls entrusted to them, can understand.

There comes a crisis in many women’s lives

—I mean women who have made unhappy marriages—when the wife becomes merged in the mother; and the divine instinct for the protection of offspring, which Providence has rooted in all our hearts, in some of us even deeper than conjugal love, asserts itself so strongly, that every other feeling bends before it. I do not say that this ought to be, I only know that it is—and I believe there are circumstances which fully justify it; for upon it depends the whole salvation of the children.

A wise and good woman once said to me, “If ever you have to choose between old and young, save the young!” Dares any one preach the doctrine, “If a woman has to choose between husband and children, save the children!” I think I dare. I give it as my deliberate opinion that when the experience of long years had killed all hope in the father, and his influence is ruining the children, the slow corruption of daily example adding to the danger of inherited temperament, the mother is bound to save her offspring from destruction;

ay, even if in so doing she has to cut adrift the blazing ship upon which once all her treasure was embarked, and escape, perhaps with life only, still with life.

In what manner Josephine Scanlan came to this conclusion, during the miserable time which followed, when she tried every means to gain her husband's confidence, to win him to acknowledge that sin was sin, and not merely "ill luck;" and that, instead of shutting his eyes on his position, he ought to look it in the face and strive to retrieve it—I do not know. But that she did come to it, I am certain. Wild and terrible thoughts, nebulous at first, and then settling into a distinct purpose, haunted her day and night. If she only had her children all to herself! to earn their bread and her own by the work of her hands, and bring them up, if ever so poorly, honestly; out of debt and out of danger, out of falsehood and sham religion, out of cowardly weakness which comes to the same result as wickedness! She meant her husband no harm, she had no

personal wrong to accuse him of; she only wished to escape from him; as she would escape from small-pox or scarlet fever, or any other infectious bodily disease, with those poor little ones, whose moral health was in her hands.

I blame her not, I only pity her; and the horrible struggle she must have gone through before there ever dawned in her mind the last hope of any woman who has once loved her husband—to leave him. How it was to be done, where and in what manner she could maintain herself and her children without coming upon him for one farthing—which she was determined never to do—was all cloudy at present; but the idea having once presented itself to her, not as a moral wrong, but a moral right, germinated day by day.

No counter-influence came to weaken it. Her husband seemed determined to avoid her, resented the slightest interference, and fell into fits of sullenness whenever she approached, in the remotest manner, that vital point in his

affairs which hung over him and his like Damocles' sword. *He* saw it not; he kept up more than his ordinary gaiety, arranged a grand opening of his new schools, as public as the Rector's melancholy state made possible, and accepted with supreme self-satisfaction the parish's tribute of gratitude for his "unparalleled exertions" in the matter.

This ovation took the form of a public breakfast, to which he, his wife, and family were invited, and whither Mrs. Scanlan, with all her children, had to go and receive the congratulations of Ditchley. Dr. Waters himself—the good old man—presented the piece of plate, with much feeling, to the Curate's wife; and hoped that these elegantly built schools, which did her husband so much credit, and which bore his name on the corner-stone, would carry it down to posterity, as well as his three noble boys: which speech César listened to, in silence certainly, but with a curl on his lip, not good to be seen in a boy who is listening to the praises of his father.

Yet how could the mother help it? She could not teach her son that his father was a hero, or even an honest, brave, truthful, ordinary man. She could only teach him, alas! nothing at all; but leave him to find out things for himself, and trust that God, who sometimes strangely instructs by contraries, would bring all things clear to her poor boy in the end.

And walking home that day, with her hand on his arm—César was taller than herself now—Mrs. Scanlan made up her mind.

Her son told her that within a month the school accounts were to be settled, Mr. Langhorne being appointed auditor.

“Does your father know this?” she asked, startled out of all precaution by the imminence of the danger.

Yes, César answered; but papa did not seem to care. And, though saying nothing, the boy showed by his manner that he guessed, plainly enough, why papa had need to care. How he had found it out the mother dared not inquire;

but that he had found out, only too surely, that his father had taken and used money which did not belong to him, was sufficiently clear. Also that his young honest soul was perplexing itself exceedingly about the matter, and all the more because, from some new and unwelcome reticence, he could not speak of it to his usual confidante in all things—his mother.

Into his father's confidence he had been taken to an extent which made Josephine tremble. Indeed, with the vague fear of his children being set against him, Mr. Scanlan had of late been unusually demonstrative to them all. Uneasy as César was, it was evident that the delicate flattery of being treated as a man, and talked to on subjects that even his mother did not know of, was not without its effect—how could it be at sixteen? When she thought of this, and of what it might result in, Josephine grew half frantic.

Her husband came home an hour or two afterwards, greatly exhilarated by his success. Radiant with gratified vanity, exulting in his

renewed popularity, and his undoubted triumph over his High Church brother, who had been present and seen it all, he walked up and down the little parlour, admiring his piece of plate, and talking about himself and his doings, till, as Bridget expressed it, "you would have thought the earth was not good enough for him to stand upon. She only wondered why the master didn't spread his wings and fly away at once, to the moon or somewhere, and then the family might get their tea comfortably." So said the sharp-witted servant, feeling thus much on the matter, and no more, for of course she knew no more. But the mistress, who did know, how felt she?

First, a sensation of most utter scorn,—a wish that she could hide, not only her children from their father, but their father from the children, who, she saw, were all looking at him, and criticising him, with that keen, silent criticism to which youth is prone—youth, just waking up to the knowledge that the grand idolon of parenthood is not an infallible divinity after all.

By and by there comes a time when, parents ourselves, we begin to have a tenderness for even the broken image of what might have been a god—but not at first. The young heart is as stern as the young conscience is tender. When children cease to be worshippers, they become iconoclasts.

Adrienne sat watching her father with those big, astonished, half-reproachful eyes of hers, but the rest only laughed at him. César at last rose and quitted the tea-table, slamming the door behind him, and muttering, as he passed through the kitchen, “that he didn’t think he could stand this style of thing much longer.” So as soon as she could, Mrs. Scanlan contrived to get her husband out of the way, to cool his head, intoxicated with laudations, upon the breezy common.

She walked with him for a long time in silence, holding his arm, and trying to gather up her thoughts so as to put what she had to say in the gentlest and most effectual form, and to drive away from her own spirit that intense

sense of disgust which now and then came over her—a sort of moral sickness, which no familiarity with Mr. Scanlan's lax ways had ever quite overcome.

We all are accustomed to have faulty kindred and friends, being ourselves, whether we think it or not, very faulty too. But what would it be to have belonging to us an actual criminal, who had not only laid himself open to the lash of the law—that sometimes falls on innocent people—but was really guilty, deserving of punishment? yet towards whom we ourselves must continue to fulfil those duties, and entertain that habitual tenderness, which guilt itself cannot annul or destroy?

Mrs. Scanlan asked herself, What if any other man, any stranger, were like her Edward, and had done what he had done, how would she have felt and acted towards him? Undoubtedly, she would have cut off herself and her children from the smallest association with him; have pitied him perhaps, but with a pity mingled with contempt. Now—oh the weakness of womanhood!

—though she planned quitting her husband, she did not hate him. Many piteous excuses for him slid into her mind. He was so feeble of will, so regardless of consequences; why had Providence made him thus, and made her just the contrary—put into her that terrible sense of right and wrong which was at once her safeguard and her torment, making her jealous over the slightest errors in those she loved, and agonizingly sensitive over her own?

Perhaps she was in error now—had been too hard upon her husband; had made virtue ugly to him by over-preaching it? Then she would preach no more but act. She had already carefully arranged a plan to get him out of his difficulty; if he agreed to it, well and good; if he refused——But further she could not look: she dared not.

“Edward”—and her voice was so gentle, that to herself it sounded like a hypocrite’s—“don’t go in just yet; we so seldom take a walk together!”

Mr. Scanlan assented. He was in the best of

tempers, the most cheerful of moods ; you would have thought he had all the world at his feet. Whatever doubts might affect him, doubt of himself never did. He talked to his wife, in a delighted vaingloriousness, of all he had done, and meant to do, with regard to the new schools.

“But are they paid for? Have you where-withal to pay? Did you replace the money you drew for yourself?”

She put the question, not accusingly, but just as a mere question, and he replied with easy composure :

“Well—not exactly. There will be a certain deficit, which I can easily explain to Mr. Langhorne. He will never be hard upon me ; me, who have worked so hard for the parish, and not been half paid from the first. It will all come right, you’ll see. Don’t vex yourself about so small a matter.”

“A small matter !” Josephine echoed, and hardly knew whether she was dealing with a child, or a man so utterly unprincipled that he

hid his misdoings under the guise of childish simplicity. "I am afraid, Edward, you are deceiving yourself. People will not think it a small matter."

"What will they think? Speak out, you most intolerable woman!"

"They will think as I think. But why repeat what I have so often said before? And we have no time for talking, we must act. César tells me——"

"What has he told you?—the simpleton!"

"Do not be afraid. Only what probably all the world knows, that Mr. Langhorne has been chosen auditor of the school accounts, and that they will be all wound up, and made generally public in a month. Is it so?"

"Oh, don't bother me! Josephine, you are always bothering! Why can't you let a man alone?"

"I would, if I were not his wife, and his children's mother. Edward, just two words. Have you thought what will happen if your accounts are looked into, and found incorrect, and you

cannot furnish the deficit, as you call it?"

"But I shall, sooner or later. Of course, I am responsible. I shall tell Langhorne so. He will hush up the matter. He would never proceed to extremities with me."

"Why not?"

"My position as a clergyman——"

"So, a clergyman may do things which, if another man did, it would be called swindling! I beg your pardon"—and Mrs. Scanlan checked the passion that shook her from head to foot: "I did not mean to use hard words, but I must use plain ones. For I believe, in spite of all you say, that Ditchley might view the thing in a different light from yourself; and that Mr. Langhorne, being a remarkably honest man, and having public money entrusted to his honesty, would find himself unwillingly obliged to have you arrested for embezzlement, clergyman as you are. You would find yourself a little uncomfortable in the county gaol."

Edward Scanlan started. "Nonsense! You are talking nonsense!"

“Excuse me, no!—I am not speaking at random: I know it for a fact.”

“How can you know it? You have not been so mad as to go and consult anybody?”

“I have not. A wife must be very mad indeed before she takes anybody into her counsel against her husband. But she must protect herself and her children, if she can. I borrowed a law-book, and found out from it everything I wanted to know on that—and other subjects.”

“I always said you were a very clever woman, and so you are. Too clever by half for a poor fellow like me.”

Edward Scanlan’s speech, bitter as it was, had an underlying cunning in it—it touched his wife’s most generous point—and he knew it.

“I am not clever, I do not pretend to be,” she cried, warmly. “I am only honest, and anxious to do my duty to both husband and children, and it is hard—hard! You drive me nearly wild sometimes. Edward, why will you not listen to me, why will you not trust me? What

motive can I have in 'worrying' you as you call it, but your own good and the children's? God knows, but for that, I would let every thing go—lay me down and die. I am so tired—so tired!"

And as she stood with her face to the sunset, even its rosy glow could not brighten her wan features, or her hair, in the raven black of which were mingling many white streaks. Josephine had arrived at the most painful crisis for a beautiful woman, when she is neither young nor old: not even middle-aged, which season has sometimes a comely grace of its own, but prematurely faded, like the trees after a hot summer of drought, which attempt no lovely autumn tints, but drop at once into winter and decay.

Her husband looked at her, and saw it. He was in a vexed mood perhaps, or else he simply said what came uppermost, without thinking, but he did say it:

"Dear me, Josephine, how very plain you are growing!"

She turned away. She would hardly have been woman had the arrow not touched her heart, but it scarcely penetrated there. She had long ceased to care for her good looks, and now she was too desperately in earnest about other things to mind what even her husband thought of her. It was not till afterwards that his words recurred to her memory and settled there, as bitter words do settle, long after the speaker has forgotten them. Now she simply turned the conversation back to the point in question, and discussed it as calmly and lucidly as she could.

The plan she urged was, that Mr. Scanlan should borrow, in some legal way, the sum wanting, giving as security a policy of assurance on his life, and finding a friend to guarantee his yearly payment of the same. This kindness she would herself ask of Dr. Waters, or of Lady Emma's husband. It was merely nominal, she knew ; because, if Edward neglected to pay the few pounds yearly, she could do it herself : her earnings through Priscilla Nunn were still con-

siderable. Her practical mind had laid out the whole scheme. She had even got the papers of an assurance office: there was nothing for Mr. Scanlan to do but to take the requisite steps for himself, which—he being unluckily a man, and therefore supposed competent to manage his own affairs and that of his household—nobody else could do for him. But his wife's common sense had simplified all to him as much as possible, and her clear head succeeded in making him take it in.

It was of no use. Either he did not like the trouble—his Irish laziness always hated trouble; or else he had that curious prejudice which some weak people have against life assurance, as against making a will. Above all, he was annoyed at his wife's having done all this without consulting him, step by step, in the affair. It seemed to imply that she had her own way in everything, which must not be. He brought in every possible argument, Apostolic or Hebraic, to prove that even to criticise or attempt to guide her husband was a dereliction from

wifely duty, which he, for one, was determined to resist.

Far different was his tone the night he flung himself at her knees, and implored her to help him; but then Mr. Scanlan had been made an important personage to-day. He was like one of those

“Little wanton boys who swim on bladders,” of his own vanity and egotism, and the bladders had been pretty well blown up since morning. Nothing that Mrs. Scanlan urged could in the least open his eyes to the reality of his position, or persuade him that he was not sailing triumphantly on a perfectly smooth sea, with all Ditchley looking at and admiring him.

“Nobody will never breathe a word against me,” repeated he, over and over again. “And I dare say, if I manage him well, Langhorne will arrange so that nobody even finds the matter out. Then, of course, it will not signify.”

“Not signify !”

Years ago—nay, only months ago—Josephine

would have blazed up into one of her "furies" as her husband called them; her passionate indignation against shams of all kinds, and especially against the doctrine that evil was only evil when it happened to be found out: but now she indulged in no such outburst. She did not even use that sarcastic tongue of hers, which sometimes could sting, and would have stung bitterly, had she not been such a very conscientious woman. She merely echoed Edward's words, and walked on in silence. But what that silence covered, it was well he did not know.

So he made himself quite comfortable and even cheerful: satisfied that he was his own master and his wife's likewise, and had used fully his marital authority. He treated the whole subject lightly, as if quite settled, and would again have passed on to other topics.

But Josephine stopped him. Her lips were white, and her hand with which she touched him was cold as stone.

"Pause a minute, Edward, before you talk of

this thing being 'settled.' It is not settled. You have a heavy time before you, though you see it not. I am very sorry for you."

"Tush—tush!" cried he, much irritated. "As if I could not manage my own affairs, and take care of myself. Do let me alone. All I ask of you is to hold your tongue."

"I will, from this time forward. Only it would not be fair, it would not be honest, if I did not tell you what I mean to do; that is, if things go on with us as they have been going on of late."

"How do you mean?"

Josephine stopped a moment to put into words, plain words, though neither imprudent nor harsh, the truth she thought it right not to keep back. Stern as her course might be, there should be at least no concealment, no double dealing in it.

"I mean, Edward, that you and I, who always differed, now differ so widely, that the struggle is more than I can bear; for I see it is destruction to the children. To use your own favourite

text, 'two cannot walk together unless they are agreed.' They had better divide."

"I am sure I have no objection. Good night, then. I never do take a walk with you that you don't scold me," said he, perhaps wilfully misunderstanding, or else, in his loose way of viewing things, he did not really catch the drift of her words.

She tried again. "I shall never scold any more; I shall not speak, but act; as seems to me right and necessary. I cannot sit still and see my children ruined."

"Ruined! Why, they are getting on exceedingly well. They'll take care of themselves, never fear. Already César knows nearly as much of the world as I do."

"Does he?" said the mother, with a thrill of fear which made her more determined than ever to say those few words—the fewest possible—which she had told herself, at all costs, she must say. "I know, Edward, children are not to a father what they are to a mother; and to you especially they have never been anything

but a burthen. I therefore have less scruple in what I intend to do."

"What are you driving at? What is the meaning of all these hints?"

"I hint nothing; I say it out plain. Your ideas of honesty and honour are not mine, and I will not have my children brought up in them. I shall therefore, as soon as I can, take a decisive step."

"What! inform against me? tell all Ditchley that your husband is a thief and a rogue? That would be a nice wife-like act."

"No. I shall not inform against you, and I shall never say one word concerning you to any body; I shall simply—leave you."

"Leave me! What ridiculous nonsense!"

Nevertheless, Edward Scanlan looked startled. Gentle as his wife was ordinarily, he knew well that, when roused, she had a spirit of her own,—that she always meant what she said, and acted upon it too. And, as sometimes in his mistaken notions of propitiating her he had told her himself, he was a little afraid of his

Josephine. But the idea she now suggested was too daringly untenable. His sense of outward respectability, nay, even his vanity, refused to take it in. After a momentary uneasiness, he burst into laughter.

“Leave me! Well, that is the drollest idea! As if you could possibly do it! Run away, bag and baggage, with the children on your back, and Bridget trotting after! What a pretty sight! How amused Ditchley would be! And how could you maintain yourself, you silly woman? Isn’t it I who keep the pot boiling?” (He did not now, but it was useless telling him so.) “Besides”—and Mr. Scanlan drew closer to his wife, and tried to put upon her “the comether,” as Bridget would say, of his winning ways—very winning when he chose—“besides, Josephine, you *couldn’t* leave me; you are fond of me; you know you are.”

Josephine drew her breath in a gasp, and looked from her husband’s face up to the face of the sky, which seemed so clear, so pure, so true.

Oh! the difference between it and us, between heaven and man!

“I was fond of you,” she said; “but if I were ever so fond—if you were dear to me as the core of my heart, and I had children whom you were doing harm to, whom it was necessary to save from you, I would not hesitate one minute: I would snatch them up in my arms, and fly.”

“Here’s a new creed!” and Mr. Scanlan laughed still, for the whole matter appeared to his shallow mind so exceedingly absurd. “Have you forgotten what St. Paul says, ‘Let not the wife depart from her husband’?”

“St. Paul was not a woman, and he had no children.”

“But he spoke through the inspiration of Scripture, every word of which we are bound to receive.”

“I dare not receive it whenever it is against truth and justice,” cried passionately the half-maddened wife. “I do not believe blindly in Scripture; I believe in God—*my* God, and not

yours. Take Him if you will, that is, if He exists at all, but leave me mine—my God, and my Christ!”

After this outbreak, which naturally horrified Edward Scanlan to a very great extent, he had nothing to say. With him everything was so completely on the surface, religion included; a mere farrago of set phrases which he never took the trouble to explain or to understand—that when any strong eager soul dared to pluck off the outside coverings of things, and pierce to the heart of them, he stood aghast. No Roman Catholic—one of those “Papists” whom he lost no opportunity of abusing—could believe more credulously in his Virgin Mary and all the saints, than did this “gospel” curate in a certain circle of doctrines, conveyed in certain fixed phrases, the Shibboleth of his portion of the Church, upon which depended the salvation of its members. God forbid that I should accuse every evangelical clergyman of being like Edward Scanlan; or that I should not allow the noble sincerity, the exceeding purity of life, the warm-

hearted Christian fellowship, and wide practical Christian charity—oh! how infinitely wider than their creed!—of this body of religionists. But to any one like Josephine, born with a keen and critical intellect, a passionate sense of moral justice, and a heart that will accept no temporising until it has found the perfect truth, the perfect right, this narrow form of faith, which openly avers that its principal aim is its own salvation, becomes, even when sincere, so repulsive, that its tendency is to end in no faith at all.

She had occasionally horrified Mr. Scanlan by remarks like the foregoing, but this last one fairly dumbfounded him. He regarded her with complete bewilderment, and then, not having a word wherewith to answer her, said, “he would pray for her.” No other conversation passed between them till they came to the gate, when he observed with a patronizing air—

“Now, my dear Josephine, I hope you have come down from your high horse, and are

ready for supper and prayers. Let us drop all unpleasant subjects. I assure you I am not angry with you, not in the least. I always wish you to speak your mind. All I want is a little peace."

Peace, peace, when there was no peace! when the merest common sense, even a woman's, was enough to show her on what a mine her husband was treading; how at any moment it might burst at his feet, and bring him and all belonging to him to ruin in the explosion. For, shut his eyes to it as he might, excuse it as she might, his act was certainly embezzlement; disgraceful enough in any man, doubly disgraceful in a clergyman. When it came to be known, in a community like Ditchley, his future and that of his family would be blighted there for ever. The straw to which she had clung in case that other future, which she was now so thankful he had never known of, failed,—namely, that on Mr. Oldham's death the living of Ditchley might be given to Mr. Scanlan, would then become impossible. Nay,

wherever he went, her husband would be branded as a thief and a swindler, and, justly or unjustly, the stigma of these names would rest upon his children. It might be that in her long torment about money matters she exaggerated the position; still it was one cruel enough to madden any honest, upright-minded woman, who was a mother likewise. A little more, and she felt it would be so; that her mind would lose its balance, and then what would become of the children?

“Edward,” said she—and her great black hollow eyes gleamed upon him like one of Michael Angelo’s sybils—(not a pleasant woman to be married to; a Venus or Ariadne might have suited him far better)—“one word before it is too late. Peace is a good thing, but there are better things still—honesty and truth. Listen to me; any honest man will see the thing as I see it. You must replace that money, and there is but one way, the way I told you of. Try that, however much you dislike it; save

yourself, and the children, and me. Husband, I was dear to you once."

"Don't blarney me," said he, cruelly, and turned away.

His wife did the same. That appeal also had failed. But she never altered her manner towards him. She was speaking only out of duty, with no hope at all.

"If you can once get clear of this liability, I will go on working as usual, and making ends meet as usual. And perhaps you will try that we shall be a little more of one mind, instead of pulling two different ways, which is such a fatal thing in the master and mistress of a household. But you must decide, and quickly. We stand on a precipice which any moment we may fall over."

"Let us fall, then!" cried he, in uncontrolled irritation, shaking off her detaining hand. "For I won't insure my life, and nobody shall make me. It looks just as if I were going to die; which no doubt I shall, if you keep on worrying me so. There, there, don't speak in your sharp

tone, which always sets my heart beating like a steam-engine, and you know my father died of heart-disease, though they say sons never take after their fathers but their mothers, which ought to be a great satisfaction to you. Never mind; when you've killed me, and are left a widow with your boys, you'll be so sorry!"

So he rambled on, in a sort of pitiful tone, but his complaints, as unreal as the bursts of carefully-arranged pathos in his sermons, affected Mrs. Scanlan very little; she was used to them. Though not robust, she always found he had strength enough for anything he liked to do. It was chiefly when he disliked a thing that his health broke down. So his lugubrious forebodings did not wound her as once they used to do. Besides—God help her!—the woman *was* growing hard.

"Very well," she said, "now we understand one another. You take your own course, I mine. I have at least not deceived you in any way; and I have had patience—years of patience."

“Oh! do cease that dreadful self-complacency. I wish you would do something wrong, if only that you might have something to repent of. You are one of the terribly righteous people ‘who need no repentance.’”

“Am I?” said Josephine. And I think—to use one of those Bible phrases so ready to Mr. Scanlan’s tongue—that instant “the devil entered into her as he entered into Judas.”

She passed into the last phase of desperation, when we cease to think whether we ought or ought not to do a thing, but only that we *will* do it.

The head of the family walked in at his front door, calling Bridget and the children to prayers, which he made especially long this night, taking occasion to bring in “Judge not, that ye be not judged;” “First take out the mote that is in thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the beam that is in thy brother’s eye;” with other similar texts, all huddled together, higgledy-piggledy, in meaningless repetition, so that the first Divine utterer

of them would scarcely have recognised His own gracious words.

Josephine heard them, as one who hears not—who desires not to hear. She merely knelt down, and rose up again, with the sense of evil possession, of the devil in her heart, stronger than ever; sinking presently into a sort of dull despair. Had things come to this pass? Well, then, let them come; and there would be an end.

An end!——

CHAPTER XII.

EVEN had Mrs. Scanlan wished again to reason with her husband, he gave her no opportunity of so doing. He scarcely spoke to her, or took any notice of her, but addressed himself entirely to the children : and, early next day, he started for one of his three days' visits to a great house on the borders of his parish, where the agreeable Irish curate was always welcome, particularly in the shooting season ; when all sorts of dukes and lords " of high emprise " assembled to make war upon pheasants and partridges. Mr. Scanlan seldom handled a gun himself—it was unclerical—but he was great at a hedge-side lunch, and greater at a smoking-room conclave. Nor did he spare any trouble to be amusing ; for, like a celebrated

countryman of his own, he “dearly loved a lord.”

When he had departed, saying loudly to Adrienne, in her mother’s hearing, “that he was sure he should enjoy himself extremely”—when the house would be empty of him for three whole days (and, oh misery! it did not feel empty, only free and clear), then Mrs. Scanlan set herself to meet the future; to ascertain, not what she ought to do—that was already decided—but in what manner she could best do it.

Deliberately, judicially, advisedly—out of no outburst of passion, no vengeance for personal wrong, but with a firm conviction that she was doing the right thing and the only thing, this woman contemplated quitting her husband—separating herself entirely from him *à mensâ et thoro*, as the lawyers say, from bed and board—for life: since after such a step there is no return. Nor was she a woman ever likely to return. She had much endurance—long patience; she was slow in making up her mind, but once made up she almost never changed it

—suffered from neither hesitations, recalcitrations, nor regrets, but went resolutely on to the end.

She knew her desertion of her husband would bring no opprobrium upon him : quite the contrary—the blame would probably be laid to her own door. He had broken none of the external duties of married life, was neither a profligate nor a drunkard ; had kept carefully within the bounds of worldly morality, and probably the world would sympathise with him much ; that is, if he made public his wife's secession, which there was no absolute necessity for him to do. “Going abroad a while for the children's education,” was the nearest and most convenient fiction to account for her absence, and this she should leave him at full liberty to use. For she had no wish either to harm him, or complain of him, or seek any remedy against him. She wanted simply to escape from him—to escape with life, and only that, for she determined to take nothing with her either of hers or the children's, except clothes.

Nor would she ever ask a penny of him for maintenance ; the whole income of the curacy should remain his to spend as he chose. Thus, to the best of her power, she meted out strict equity between him and herself, as well as between him and his children. They had never owed much to their father, except the mere gift of existence ; henceforward she determined they should owe nothing. It would be her daily counsel to them to struggle, work, starve even, rather than ask him for anything. In the new and terrible code which she had laid down for herself, to which she had been driven by most cruel circumstance, no love, no generosity was possible—only stern, even-handed justice, the same on both sides. She tried to see it, to do it.

Feeling of every kind the miserable wife put aside from her entirely. Had she for one instant let the flood-gates of emotion loose, her reason, strength, and power of action would have been swamped entirely.

She knew she was acting contrary to most

laws, social and scriptural, which the world believes in; but this moved her not. It was Mrs. Scanlan's peculiarity that, her conscience clear, nothing external affected her in the least: also, that if dissatisfied with herself, no praises of others satisfied her for a moment. Therefore in this her flight, from moral as from physical contagion, she consulted no one, trusted no one, but was resolved simply to take her children, and depart.

This departure must be sudden; and, of necessity, in Mr. Scanlan's absence; but she would arrange it so as to make it as private as possible, so that he might give to it whatever explanation he pleased. Whether for or against herself she little cared; her only anxiety was to do the right thing; nor, with that extraordinary singleness of purpose she had, did it much trouble her whether other people thought well or ill of her for doing it.

The only person to whom she meant to confide the secret of her flight, and the place where she would be found, was Priscilla Nunn; upon whom

she depended for future subsistence. Priscilla had often lamented that Mrs. Scanlan was not in Paris, where she had lately established an agency, in which house Josephine's skilful handiwork could have earned twice the income it did here. To Paris, therefore, the mother determined to go; *la belle France*, which she had taught her children to dream of as a sort of earthly paradise, where the sun always shone, and life was all pleasantness and brightness. That every one of her young folk would be eager to go—asking no questions; for she had determined to answer none, except in the very briefest way—she had not a shadow of doubt. Her influence with her children was still paramount and entire.

Once in France, and all her own, to be brought up in the traditions of her race; in the pure Huguenot faith, such as she saw it through the golden haze of memory; in the creed of chivalry and honour which, though poor as peasants since the time of the first Revolution, the De Bougainvilles had ever held unstained—oh, how

happy both she and her little flock would be!

Most of all, César, who was just reaching the age when the most affectionate of fathers and sons seldom quite agree, and Nature herself gives the signal of temporary separation; after which they meet again on equal terms as man and man, neither encroaching on the rights of the other. In spite of their late alliance—more dangerous than any quarrel—César and his father had been far from harmonious for the last year or two; and the boy had confessed that he should be only too thankful when he was out in the world, “on his own hook.”

Now, César was his mother's darling. Not openly—she was too just to let partiality appear—but in her heart she built more hopes on him than on any of her children. None the less so because she saw in him the old generation revived. Josephine had had a passionate admiration for her father; so strong that it made her struggle to the last to keep sacred in her children's eyes that pitiful imitation of true fatherhood which it had been their lot to have,

while she herself had been blessed with the reality. Her half-broken, empty heart clung to the image of her dead father which she saw revived in her living son—the hope that, passing over a generation, the old type might be revived, and César might grow up—not a Scanlan at all—wholly a De Bougainville.

It seemed so at present. Besides being externally so like the old Vicomte that he startled her continually by tones, gestures, modes of speech, as if it were the dead come alive again—he seemed in character to be strong, reliable, truthful, honest ; everything that his grandfather had been, and his father was not. And yet to confide in him, to enlist him against his father, was a thing at which Josephine's sense of right recoiled at once. The only thing she could do—which she was in a measure forced to do—was to learn from her son the exact footing upon which matters stood.

She did it very simply, cutting the Gordian knot by what is at once the sharpest and safest knife that anybody can ever use—truth.

“César, I have some very important plans in my mind, which concern you as well as myself; they will be settled in a day or two, and then I will tell you them: in the meantime tell me everything that has passed between you and your father. I have a right to know, and Papa knows I meant to ask you.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” cried the boy, greatly relieved, and immediately began and told everything.

It was worse than she had anticipated, and caused her to regret, not her haste but her dilatoriness, in compelling this confidence. With the rash incontinence of speech which formed such a curious contrast to his fits of cunning reticence, Mr. Scanlan had not hesitated to explain all his affairs to his son—that is, in the light in which he viewed them. And he had for months past been in the habit, whenever he wanted money, of sending the lad about “begging,” as César angrily called it: borrowing from house to house small sums, on one excuse or other, till there was hardly a well-to-do fam-

ily in the parish who had not lent him something, and never been repaid.

“And the strange thing is,” said the boy, who, his tongue and his conscience being both unsealed, opened his whole heart to his mother, “that papa does not intend to pay, yet seems to think this not wrong at all. He says that it is the business of the parish to maintain him comfortably, and that borrowing money is only doing as the Israelites did—‘spoiling the Egyptians.’ Mamma, what does he mean?”

The mother answered nothing. She did not dare to meet her boy's eyes; she only cast them upwards in a kind of despair, as if taking Heaven to witness that the step she contemplated was not only right, but inevitable.

It struck her, however, that before she took it she ought to discover, not the equity—of that she had no doubt—but the law of what she was about to do: how far her rights extended, and what legal mode of defence she had, supposing her lot drifted her into that cruel position—a wife who has to protect

herself against her natural protector, her husband.

That night, the children being all in bed, and even Bridget's watchful eyes at last sealed safe in slumber, Mrs. Scanlan took down a big book which she had some time ago borrowed from Mr. Langhorne, and began carefully to study the laws relating to married women and their property, in order to ascertain what her rights were: only her rights—no more.

She found what many an unfortunate wife and mother has found: that, according as the law of England then stood, and, with little modification, now stands, a married woman has no rights at all.

First—for Josephine had strength and courage to write all things down, so as to have the case as clearly before her mind as possible—unless there exists an ante-nuptial settlement, every farthing a wife may have, or acquire, or earn, is not hers, but her husband's, to seize and use at his pleasure. Second—that he may personally “chastise” her, “confine” her, re-

strict her to the merest necessities, or treat her with every unkindness short of endangering her life, without being punishable. Third—that if she escapes from him, he can pursue her, and bring her back, forcing her to live with him, and share, however unwillingly, the burthen and disgrace of his wrong-doings; or, if he dislikes this, he may refuse to maintain her: while, at the same time, if she is able to maintain herself, he can swoop down upon her from time to time, and appropriate all her earnings, she having no defence whatever against him. Is he not her husband, and all hers his, no matter how acquired?

Then, as regards her children. After they are seven years old he can take them from her, denying her even access to them, and bringing them up exactly as he chooses, within certain limits, which the law, jealous of interference with paternal authority, usually makes broad enough. In fact, until they become of age, they are as much in his power as his wife is—mere goods and chattels, for whom he is re-

sponsible to no one, so long as he offends society by no open cruelty or crime.

Rich women, who can make to themselves a barricade of trustees, settlements, &c.—those ingenious devices by which the better classes protect themselves against the law—are able to neutralize its effects a little; but for poor women, working women, dowerless women, this is how it stands; and thus, after a long hour of half-incredulous studying, Mrs. Scanlan found it.

She sat, perfectly aghast. In her ignorance, she had never contemplated such a state of things. She knew marriage was, in a sense, a bondage, as all duties and ties must be more or less; but she believed it a sacred bondage, the same on both sides, or rather a partnership, in which each had equal rights, equal responsibilities, and, did either fail in the fulfilment of them, equal powers of self-defence against the wrong. For, alas! such is the imperfection of things human, that in all bonds we accept—including marriage—it behoves us not to forget

the melancholy maxim, "Treat every enemy as a possible friend, and every friend as a possible enemy." And it harms no men or women who have found in a married partner their best and closest friend, to know that other miserable men and women, who have proved theirs to be their direst enemy, have a refuge and protection provided for them by the law, which is a terror to evil doers only, not to those who do well.

Josephine Scanlan, now that she knew her lot, writhed under it as if she had felt coiling round her the rings of a serpent. It bound her, it strangled her, it hissed its hot breath in her face, till she seemed nearly growing mad.

She had married—which alone implied that she had been content to merge her existence in that of her husband ; that she desired no prominent self-assertion, no contradictory rights. Had her marriage turned out what marriage should be, neither would ever have thought of their rights at all, only of their duties, and

scarcely even of these ; for love would have transformed them into pure delights. But every union is not a happy one ; every bridegroom is not what his bride believes him ; nor—for let us be just—every bride what her husband hopes to find her. In such cases, what redress ? For the husband, some, seeing he has the power in his own hands ; for the wife, none at all. The man may be knave or fool, may beggar her by his folly, disgrace and corrupt her children by his knavery, yet she can neither cut him adrift, as he can her under similar circumstances, nor escape from him, as Josephine Scanlan desired to do.

All in vain. She found that, struggle as she might, she could not get free. Though she wanted nothing from her husband, was prepared to maintain herself and her children, not interfering with him in any way, still he had just the same rights over her, could pursue her to the world's end, take her children from her, possess himself of everything she had—and the law would uphold him in this, so long as he

kept within its bounds, and committed no actual crime. There it was, clear as daylight; that however bad a man may be, however fatal his influence and dangerous his association to those belonging to him—for nothing short of adultery or cruelty can a wife get protection against him, or succeed in separating herself from him and his fortunes.

There are people who believe this to be right, and according to Scripture. I wonder whether they would still believe it if they found themselves in the position of Josephine Scanlan?

As she sat reading, in the dead of night, with the house so still that the scream of a little mouse behind the wainscot startled her, and made her shiver with nervous dread, there came over her, first a sense of utter despair, and then the frenzied strength which is born of despair. Rights or no rights, law or no law, she would be free. Nothing on earth should bind her, an honest woman, to a dishonest man; nothing should force her to keep up the sham of love

where love was gone; nothing should terrify her into leaving her poor children to the contamination of their father's example. No, she would be free. By fair means or foul, she would set herself free, and them likewise.

A timid woman, or one who was keenly alive to the world's opinion, might have hesitated; but Josephine had come to that pass when she recognised no law but her conscience, no religion except a blind faith that God, being a just God, would make all things right in the end. Beyond this, she felt nothing; except a resolute, desperate, and utterly fearless will, that was capable of any effort, and stopped by no hindrance. While she sat calculating all the pros and cons, the risks and difficulties of the course she was still as ever determined upon—only it now required cunning as well as resolution, deception instead of truth—she recalled the story of a certain Huguenot ancestress—also a Josephine de Bougainville—who, when the Catholics attacked her house, stood at its doorway, pistol in hand, with her two

children behind her, and fought for them, killing more than one man the while, until she was killed herself. Josephine Scanlan would have done the same—and she knew it.

No future contingencies on the side of expediency perplexed her mind. Mr. Oldham's death might not happen for years, and when it did happen it might not affect her: the fortune might be left elsewhere. Nay, if not, what matter? As the law stood, it would not be hers, but her husband's; and he would be as unscrupulous over thousands as he had been over hundreds. Once she had thought differently, had fondly hoped that the possession of wealth would make him all right; now she knew the taint in him was ineradicable. His dishonesty, his utter incapacity to recognise what honesty was, seemed an actual moral disease. And diseases are hereditary. At least, nothing but the utmost care can prevent them from becoming hereditary. Even as a noble ancestor often stamps his likeness, mental and physical, upon unborn generations, so

does any base blood, morally speaking—for moral baseness is the only real degradation—crop out in a family, now and then, in the most mysterious way, for generations; requiring every effort of education to conquer it, if it can ever be conquered at all.

Mrs. Scanlan's ambition for her children was altered now. Once she had wished to make them rich—now her only longing was that they should be honest. The wealth of the Indies would be worth nothing to her, if they learnt to use it as their father—faithless in much as he had been in little—would assuredly teach them. Better that César and Louis, and even delicate Adrienne, should earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and earn it honestly, than that they should share any bread, even a father's, that was unrighteously gained; or grow up reckless, selfish spendthrifts, to whom wealth was no blessing, only an added curse. If it came, let him take it! she cared not. Her sole hope was to snatch up her children and fly.

That very night Josephine laid her plans, modified according to the new light which she had gained as to her legal position—laid them with a caution and foresight worthy of one of those righteous conspirators against unrighteous authority, who, according as they succeed or fail, are termed in history patriots or traitors. Some end on a throne, others on a scaffold; but I think, if they have an equally clear conscience, heaven gives to both good rest. And good rest, strangely calm, came to Josephine's tired eyelids somewhere about dawn.

She woke with the feeling of something having happened, or being about to happen—the sort of feeling that most of us have on a marriage or funeral morning, for they are strangely alike,—that this day will make, for good or ill, a great gulf between the old life and the new. Nevertheless, she rose and prepared for it, as somehow or other we all do prepare, with a fictitious calmness, that grows easier each minute as we approach the inevitable.

On descending to her children, the first thing she saw was a letter from Mr. Scanlan, not to herself but to Adrienne, saying he was enjoying himself so much that he meant to stay away the whole week. Therefore she had before her that week. Within it, something might occur. No, nothing could occur—nothing that could save her from the act which she felt was a necessity. Only a miracle could so change things as to cause her to change ; and miracles do not happen in these days.

Simple as her preparations were, she found them a little difficult to manage, without exciting the suspicion of her household. At first, she had intended to take Bridget with her ; now, she decided not. No one should be compromised by her departure : no one, until she was clearly away, should know anything about it.

Besides, in leaving Bridget behind at Wren's Nest, she left a certain guarantee that things would go on rightly there, and Mr. Scanlan's

physical comforts be looked after, at least for the present.

For, strangely enough, up from the fathomless tragedy of her heart came floating small, ridiculous, surface things—such as who would arrange her husband's breakfasts and dinners, see that he had everything comfortable, and do for him the thousand and one trifles which—he being either more helpless or more lazy than most men—these seventeen years she had been in the habit of doing for him? Mechanically she did them to the last; even sewing buttons on his clean shirts, and looking over his clothes for several weeks to come, till the farce and the tragedy of her departure mixed themselves together in such a horrible way, and the familiar facts of every-day life assumed such a ghastly pathos, that she felt she must shut her eyes and steel her heart, if her purpose was to be carried out at all.

Day after day slipped past; as they slip past a doomed man who has lost all hope of reprieve, yet has become not quite indifferent to dying—

a death in the midst of life ; which, so far as this world ends, is ended for ever. It may be the entrance to a new life, but this life is the familiar one—this is the one he understands. Somewhat thus did Josephine feel, when night after night she lay down in her empty silent chamber, foretasting the loneliness that would henceforward be hers till death. Yet she never wavered. She believed she was doing right ; and with her, that question being decided, no after-thought ever came.

Still, she deferred till the very last making her only necessary confidence, which was to Priscilla Nunn. Even to her it would be very brief, merely enough to secure the faithful woman's help in Paris, and to conceal her address there from everybody, including Mr. Scanlan. Further, neither to Priscilla nor to any one did she intend to explain. When we have to hew off a rotten branch to save the rest of the tree, we hew it off ; but we do not sit slashing and hacking at it, and prating to all comers what harm it has done us, and the rea-

son why we cut it down. At least, Josephine was not the woman to do this : she acted, but she never talked.

Having settled almost word for word—the fewest possible—what she had to explain to Priscilla, she started on her walk to receive from the little shop the money that was due to her—a tolerable sum, enough to take her and the children to Paris, and keep them there, at least beyond want, for a short time, till she obtained the work which, with Priscilla's assistance, she had no fear of getting. Everything she did was done in the most methodical manner, even to the new name she meant to take—her mother's maiden name—which she did not think Mr. Scanlan had ever asked or heard.

She had hoped to go through Ditchley without meeting any one she knew, but just before she reached Priscilla's shop she was stopped by Mr. Langhorne, whom she had not seen for some time, since the sudden friendliness which had sprung up between them after Mr. Old-

ham's illness had as suddenly died down—she well guessed why. From her husband's irritability whenever the lawyer was named, she knew he had tried to borrow from him, and failed: after which little episode Mr. Scanlan could never see merit in anybody: so Josephine let this friend also drop from her; as she did all her friends. It was safest and best for them and for her.

Still, she and Mr. Langhorne spoke kindly when they did meet, and now he crossed the street to join her. He had been calling at the Rectory, he said: had found Mr. Oldham somewhat better, and the nurse, trying to make out the poor invalid's confused speech, had caught the name of Mrs. Scanlan. Would it not be well, Mr. Langhorne suggested, for Mrs. Scanlan to go and see him?

Josephine hesitated. Great griefs had so swallowed up her lesser ones that she had not visited her poor old friend for some weeks past. Now that she was quitting him too—for what must surely be an eternal farewell—she thought

she ought to go and see him once more. It would be painful, for she had always kept a tender corner in her heart for Mr. Oldham; but happily he would never know the pain.

“Do you really think he wants me, or that he has begun again to notice anybody? In that case I would gladly go much oftener than I do.”

What was she promising, when she could fulfil nothing? when in a few days—nay, a few hours—her fate would have come, and she would have left Ditchley for ever? Struck with a sudden consciousness of this, she stopped abruptly—so abruptly, that Mr. Langhorne turned his keen eyes upon her; which confused her still more.

Then he said, in a somewhat formal manner,

“I do not urge you to go; I never have urged you, knowing it could make no difference in anything now. Still, if our poor friend has any consciousness; and we never know how much he has, I think it would be a kind thing for you to see him often.”

"I will go at once," she said, and parting from Mr. Langhorne, took the turning towards the Rectory, passing Priscilla Num's door. As she passed it, she was conscious of a certain relief: in being able to keep, if for only an hour longer, the bitter secret which she had hitherto so rigidly hidden from all her neighbours, which, so long as it is unconfessed, seems still capable of remedy—the misery of an unhappy marriage.

The Rectory garden looked sweet as ever, carefully tended by the honest old gardener whom Bridget would not marry. Mrs. Scanlan stopped to speak to him, and ask after his new wife, a young and comely woman, to whom, in spite of Bridget, he made an exceedingly good husband.

Yes, he was very comfortable, he said—hadn't a care in the world except for the dear master and the grief it was to keep the garden so nice, with nobody to look at it. He only wished Mrs. Scanlan would come sometimes and make herself at home there, and say what she'd like to

have done in it, since perhaps when it pleased God to take the dear master out of his troubles, she might come there for good and all.

Josephine shrank back, knowing well what the honest fellow alluded to—the common talk of the parish, that Mr. Scanlan was to succeed Mr. Oldham as the Rector of Ditchley. It seemed as if every word that everybody said to her that day was fated to stab her like a knife.

But when she went upstairs to Mr. Oldham's room, her agitation subsided, and a strange peacefulness came over her. It often did, in presence of that living corpse; which had all the quietness of death itself, and some of the beauty; for the face was not drawn or altered; and any one whom he liked to see, Mr. Oldham was still able to welcome with his old smile. As he welcomed his visitor now; signalling for her to come and sit beside him, and take possession of his powerless hand.

Though there was as yet in his countenance no sign of that merciful order of release which his nearest and dearest could not but have hailed

as the best blessing possible to the poor old man, still this smile of his seemed more serene than ordinary, and his eyes rested upon his visitor with a wistful affectionateness, as if he too were taking a farewell—his farewell of her, not hers of him. In the stillness of the sick room, Mrs. Scanlan forgot for a time everything but her poor old friend, who had been so true to her, and so faithfully kind to her. Her personal griefs melted away, her bitter and troubled spirit grew calm. The silent land, the land where all things are forgotten, which was, alas! the only light in which she looked at the invisible world—for her husband's heaven was almost as obnoxious to her as his hell—because a less awful, nay, a desirable country. In it she might perchance find again—only perchance! for everything connected with religious faith had grown doubtful to her—those who had loved her, and whom it had been noble, not ignoble, to love; her mother, dead when she was still a child; her father, the vivid remembrance of whom alone made her still believe in the fatherhood of God;

possibly, even her little infants, who had but breathed and died, and were now laid safely asleep in Ditchley churchyard. As she sat by Mr. Oldham's bed, she could see their white headstone gleam in the sunset. And she thanked God that they at least were safe, these three out of her nine.

And into this unknown land, to join this dear known company, Mr. Oldham would soon be travelling too. The puerile and altogether material fantasy, which is yet not unnatural—that she should like to send a message by him to her dead, affected her strangely. It would have been such a comfort; just one word to tell her father that she was struggling on her best through this rough world, but would be so glad to be with him, and at peace. She sat until the tears came dropping quietly; sat, holding Mr. Oldham's hand, and speaking a little now and then, in that sad monologue which was all that was possible with him now. But still she felt less unhappy, less frozen-up. The sense of filthy lucre—of money, money, money, being the en-

grossing subject of life, its one hope, fear, and incessant anxiety—faded away in the distance. Here, beside that motionless figure, never to be moved again till lifted from the bed into the coffin, the great truth that we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, forced itself upon her, with a soothing strength, as it had never done before.

She might have remained longer on this, which she meant to be her last visit—only in the external calm and cheerfulness that must be kept up with Mr. Oldham it would not do to think of such things—but Dr. Waters came in, and when she rose to go home he asked her if she would accept an old man's escort over the common; it was growing too dark for a lady to cross it alone.

“Thank you,” said she, touched by the kindness, and stayed. For one day more she might still safely put off her arrangements with Priscilla, and so extreme was her shrinking, even within herself, from all final measures, that this was rather a relief. A relief too it was that, in

bidding good-night to Mr. Oldham, she added—and sincerely meant it—“I shall come again and see you to-morrow,” and so avoided the last pang of farewell.

When they went away together she asked her good friend the doctor what he thought of his patient's state, and how long it might continue. Not that this would affect her purposes in any way; for she had determined it should not; still she wanted to know.

But no medical wisdom could pronounce an opinion. Dr. Waters thought that life, mere animal life, might linger in that helpless frame for months or years, or another stroke might come, and the flickering taper be extinguished immediately. But in either case, the old man was not likely to suffer any more.

“Thank God for that!” sighed Mrs. Scanlan, with a curious sort of envy of Mr. Oldham.

She had had it before—that desperate craving for rest, only rest! as if the joys of Paradise itself would be mere weariness; and all she wanted was to lie down in the dark and sleep. There

was upon her that heavy hush before a storm ; before the God of mercy as well as judgment arises in lightning and thunders to rouse us out of that lethargy which, to living souls, is not repose but death. Almost before she had time to breathe the storm broke.

“Mrs. Scanlan,” said Dr. Waters suddenly, pressing her hand with a kindly gesture, for he knew her well, had been beside her in many a crisis of birth and death, and was well aware too, though he never referred to it, how faithfully she had kept his own miserable domestic secret in years past—“Mrs. Scanlan, where is your husband to-day?”

She told him.

“I am glad. A week’s amusement will be good for him. He is quite well, I hope?”

“Perfectly well.”

One of those shivers which superstition calls “walking over one’s own grave” ran through Josephine. Did Dr. Waters suspect anything? Or was it only her own vague terror, which had made her feel for weeks past as if she were tread-

ing on a mine ; that she discovered in his words something deeper than ordinary civility. Had he discovered anything of her husband's misdoings ? She feared, but her fear was altogether different from the reality. It came soon.

“I walked home with you to-night, partly that I might say a word to you about your husband. You are too sensible a woman to imagine I mean more than I say, or to give yourself groundless alarm.”

“Alarm !” she repeated, her mind still running in the one groove where all her misery lay. “Tell me quickly ; do tell me.”

“Nay, there is really nothing to tell : it is merely a harmless bit of precaution. You are aware that your husband consulted me the other day about effecting an assurance on his life ?”

She was not aware, but that mattered little. “Go on, please.”

“He said you were very anxious he should do it, and he had refused, but, like the disobedient son in the parable, afterwards he repented

and went. You wished it, he added, as a provision for yourself and the children."

"I! Provision for me and the children!" Even yet she had not grown accustomed to her husband's startling modifications of facts.

The quick-witted physician saw her angry confusion, and tried to help her through it. "Well, well, it was something of the kind. I cannot be very accurate, and I never interfere in family affairs. All I want to urge upon you is, unless there is some very urgent necessity, do not let him try to insure his life."

"Why not?" said she, facing the truth in her direct, almost fierce way.

"Because I am afraid no office would take him. He has—this need not frighten you; hundreds have it; I have it myself, and you see what an old man I have grown to—but he has confirmed disease of the heart."

"Oh, doctor!"

This was all she said, though the bolt, God's own bolt of terror, sent to rouse her from her lethargic despair, had fallen in her very sight.

In all her thoughts about her husband the thought of his death had never crossed her imagination. He seemed one of the sort of people who live for ever, and enjoy life under all circumstances; being blessed with an easy temper, a good digestion, and no heart to speak of. That he, Edward Scanlan, should bear about with him a confirmed mortal disease, and not feel it, not know it; the thing was impossible and she said so vehemently.

Dr. Waters shook his head.

“It is a very good thing that he does not know it, and he never may, for this sort of complaint advances so slowly that he may live many years, and die of some other disease after all. But there it is, and any doctor could find it out—the doctor of the Assurance Company most certainly would. And if Mr. Scanlan, with his nervous temperament, were told of it, the consequences might be serious. Therefore, I tell his wife, who is the bravest woman I know, and who can keep a secret better than any other woman I know.”

“Ah!” she groaned, feeling that upon her was laid for life another burthen. No lying down to rest now; she must arise and bear it. “What shall I do? What can I do?” she said at last.

“Nothing. Forewarned is forearmed. Telling you this seems cruel, but it is the best kindness. Cheer up, my dear Mrs. Scanlan. I am sure you have looked so ill of late that your husband may live to bury you yet, if that is what you desire. Only take care of him; keep him from over-excitement, and above all from Assurance offices.”

“I understand. I will remember. Thank you. You are very kind.”

Her words, brief and mechanical, were meant as a good-bye, and Dr. Waters took them as such, and left her at the gate of Wren's Nest without offering to go in. Nor did she ask him; the strain upon her was such that, if it had lasted another ten minutes, she felt as if she would have gone mad.

She sat down, a few yards only from her own

door, behind a furze-bush on the common, which lay all lonely and silent under the stars, and tried to collect her thoughts together, and realize all she had heard.

I have said, that in the noblest sense of love, clear-eyed, up-looking, trustful, that ever loves the highest, Mrs. Scanlan had ceased to love her husband. Natural affection may revive by fits and starts, and a certain pitiful tenderness is long of dying; but that a good woman should go on loving a bad man, in the deep and holy sense of woman's love, is, I believe, simply impossible. If she did, she would be either a fool—or something worse. But often, when love is dead and buried, duty arises out of its grave, assuming its likeness, even as the angel assumed that of King Robert of Sicily, till one cannot tell which is the king and which the angel; and over this divine travesty we may weep, but we dare not smile.

The Edward Scanlan of to-day was in nowise different from the Edward Scanlan of yesterday. And yet his wife felt that her relation to him

was totally changed. So long as he was well and happy, gaily careering through life, indifferent to everybody but himself, selfish, unprincipled, dishonest, and yet of that easy nature that he would always contrive to fall on his feet, and reappear on the best terms with everybody; then she felt no compunction at quitting him: nay, her desertion became a righteous act. But now? Every noble, tender, generous feeling in the woman's breast revolted at doing the very thing which an hour before she had been resolved upon.

This change seemed hardly her own act—at least she did it more by instinct than reasoning: indeed, she hardly reasoned at all about it, or paused to consider whether, in thus totally ignoring her past resolve, she needed to blame herself for having ever made it. It was now impossible: that was enough. While desperately pursuing one course, fate, or circumstance, or Providence, had seized her with a strong right hand, and flung her upon another.

“I can’t go away,” she said, and rocked herself to and fro, with sobs and tears. “I must ‘take care of him,’ as Dr. Waters told me. What could he do without me? What should I do if he wanted me, and I were not there?”

This was all she thought, all she argued. Her single-minded nature took all things simply, without morbid introspection, or needless self-reproach. Indeed, she hardly thought of herself at all in the matter, until there suddenly flashed across her the remembrance of the children—and for a minute or two her head was in a whirl, and she was unable to see the path of duty clearly. Only duty. No sentimental revulsion of feeling drew her back to the days when the children were not, and her young lover-husband was to her all in all. Those days were dead for ever; he had himself destroyed them.

She never for a moment disguised from herself that her children—those “incumbrances,” as Mr. Scanlan often called them—were infinitely dearer to her than he. She *must* save

her children, but was she to do it by forsaking their father ?

“Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

Most true—not man. But there are cases when God himself does it; when with His righteous sword of division He parts the wicked from the innocent, the pure from the impure. The difficulty is for our imperfect mortal vision to see this, to recognise the glitter of that sharp, inevitable sword, and acquiesce in the blow of the invisible Hand.

Josephine attempted it not. Nor do I attempt to judge her either in what she did, or what she did not do; I only state the result—that her communication with Priscilla Nunn was never made; and it was not until both were dead that any one ever knew how near she had been to quitting her husband for ever.

For more than an hour Mrs. Scanlan sat crouched under that furze-bush, open only to the gaze of the stars, for ever marching on in their courses, irresistibly, remorselessly, taking

no heed of any one of us all. Then, impelled by a vague consciousness that the night was very chilly, that if she took cold she should be ill, and if she were ill, what would become of the household, she rose and went indoors.

Not to the children, though she heard their voices at play in the parlour, but up at once to her own room. There, in passing, she rested her hand upon the pillow where her husband's head had lain for seventeen years, turned round, stooped, and kissed it.

"I will not go," she said. "Who will hold fast to him if I do not? No, I'll not go."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. SCANLAN had full time for re-considering her determination, had she been so inclined, for her husband did not return on the day he had named. Not even though she sent on to him a note from Mr. Langhorne, urgently requesting the settling of the school-accounts. Evidently he had put off to the last extremity possible, the fatal crisis, and was afraid to meet it even now. She was not, though she knew it must come, and soon ; but it only confirmed her resolution not to quit him.

Women are strange creatures—I, a woman, say it. Men think they know us : but they never do. They are at once above us, and below us ; but always different from us, both in our good points and our bad.

Josephine had never had any real happiness

in her husband ; neither comfort, nor trust, nor rest. Fond of her he undoubtedly was, even yet ; but it was a man's sort of fondness, beginning and ending in himself, from the great use and support she was to him. Unto her he had been a perpetual grief, a never-ceasing anxiety ; yet the idea of losing this, of letting him go and doing without him, or rather of allowing him to do without her, presented itself to her now as a simple impossibility. The tie which bound her was not love—I should profane the word if I called it so—but a stern, heroic, open-eyed faithfulness ; seeing every one of the thorns of her most difficult way, yet deliberately following it out still. Her life henceforward must be one long battle ; no quiet, no pause, no lying down to that longed-for rest. “No peace for the wicked,” said she mockingly to herself oftentimes, but took little thought whether it applied to her, whether she was righteous or wicked. One thing she knew she was, and must be—bold. Courage was her only chance now.

After discovering that as a married woman she had no legal rights, and no help or aid was possible from any one, she had determined to take the law into her own hands, and protect herself as well as she could; both by boldness, and, if necessary, by the quality which in woman is called cunning, in man only diplomacy. This was the easier, because, as she well knew, her husband's prominent characteristic was cowardice. He was always afraid of somebody or something, and not unfrequently afraid of himself. He had no persistent will at all; it was a joke among the children, that if ever Papa talked about a thing, he was quite certain not to do it, and whatever he did was done by accident. Thus his wife knew that when it came to the point she was twice as strong as he.

Her plan of action had been very simple: to leave home, as if for a short journey, to cross over at once to Paris, and there, assuming a French name, to pass off herself and her children as French returned refugees; if she obtained work, and she was unpursued, she meant to re-

main in Paris ; otherwise, to fly to the 'New World, or Australia—anywhere ! so that she had her children, and could escape her husband. Great as his power was over her and them legally, morally it was but small : for tyrant and victim change places when the one has the soul of a lion, and the other that of a hare ; and a mother, driven to despair, with her children to guard, has always something of the lioness in her, which makes her rather a dangerous animal to deal with.

Tragical as was the pass she had come to, there was a certain comfort in it—a power in her hands of which she knew she could at any time avail herself ; her refuge was not her husband's strength, but his cowardice. And now that she had changed her mind, and resolved not to leave him, but to stay and meet the worst, she hoped that the same courage which would have thrown him off, and withstood him at a distance, might keep him in bounds while near. She could trust him no more, believe in him no more ; she stood quite alone, and must defend

herself and her children alone ; still, she thought she could do it. She must look things boldly in the face, and act accordingly. There must be no weak yielding to what was doubtful or wrong; no pretence of wifely duty, to “love, honour, and obey”—because when the two first do not exist, the third becomes impossible—a ridiculous, unmeaning sham. Neither must there be as regarded the children any setting up of superstitious filial fetishes, only to be kicked down again, as all false gods ultimately are. If her children found out, as they often did, that their father had told them a lie, she must not mask it, or modify it, as often she had done, to avoid exposing him. She must say distinctly, “It is a lie, but he cannot help it ; it is his nature not to be able to distinguish between truth or falsehood. Pity him, and tell the truth yourselves.” The same, in that terrible laxity of principle he had as to money-matters, and the hundred other crooked ways in which he was always walking ; where, rather than see her children walk, she would see them—she often prayed that she

might see them!—drop one after the other into their quiet graves.—(Did God, not in anger, but in mercy, answer the prayer? I cannot tell. Her lot was hard, but it might have been harder.)

While resolving that, in any moral crisis of this sort, she would have no hesitation whatever in opening her children's eyes to the errors of their father, she still thought she should be able to keep them to their strict duty, and teach them to honour—not the individual parent: that was impossible—but the abstract bond of parenthood; so beautiful, so divine, that the merest relics of it should be kept in a certain sort of sanctity to the last by every human being.

It was a difficult, almost a super-human task that Mrs. Scanlan was setting herself; but it was easier than the only two other alternatives—to succumb entirely to evil, or, by flying from it, to forsake her husband, and leave him to trouble, shame, sickness, death.

That the collapse of his affairs must soon come, she was certain. She hardly thought he

would be prosecuted, but he would be driven from Ditchley a dishonest man, his clerical work at an end for ever. Therefore upon her alone would thenceforward rest the maintenance of the family; even as she had intended, but with the additional burthen of her husband. What matter? She had long ceased to look forward, at least in any happy way. Her hopes had all turned to despair, her blessings to misfortunes. Even that possible fortune, the prospect of which had so long upheld her, had it not been less a blessing than a curse? But for it, and its numbing effect upon her, she might have striven more against Mr. Scanlan's recklessness, or have risen up with a strong will, and taken into her own hands the reins which his were too weak to hold. But the gnawing of this secret at her heart had given her a sense of guiltiness against him, which had made her feeble of resistance, indifferent to the present, in the hope of the future. Yet why regret these things? It was all too late now.

She was sure trouble was at hand, when on

Sunday morning Mr. Seanlan had not come home, and she had at the last minute to send César about in all directions to get some friendly clergyman as his substitute. That being done, and her fears roused, lest, urged by the pressure of circumstances, or some sudden dread of discovery, he might actually have left the country, the Curate walked in—crawled in, would be the better word : for he had an aspect not unlike a whipped hound. Afraid lest the children should notice him, their mother hurried them off to church, and took him straight upstairs ; where he threw himself down upon the bed in a state of utter despondency.

“It’s all over with me ; I knew it would be. You refused to help me, and so it has come to this !”

“Come to what ?” said Josephine. He had not asked, nor she given, any welcoming caress, but she had followed him upstairs, and done various little duties that he expected of her. Now she stood beside him, pale, quiet, prepared for whatever might happen.

“That fellow Langhorne will wait no longer. He insists upon having the books, to go into them next week. And the money is gone, and I can't replace it. So I am ruined, that's all.”

“Yes.”

“I have done the best I could,” added Mr. Scanlan in an injured tone. “I even took your advice, and went to Dr. Waters about insuring my life, and he promised to inquire. But he too has played me false. I have heard no more from him. All the world has forsaken me—I am a lost man. And there you are, dressed in your best, looking so nice and comfortable; I daresay you have been very comfortable without me all the week—going to church too, as if nothing was the matter. Well, there, go! Leave me to my misery, and go.”

To all this, and more, Josephine made no reply. She was too busy watching him, trying to read in his face something which might either confirm or refute Dr. Waters' opinion concerning him. She did see, or fancied she saw, in spite of his florid complexion, a certain unwholesome

greyness, and wondered, with a sharp twinge of self-reproach, that she had never noticed it before. It was no dearer to her, no nobler, this handsome, good-natured, and yet ignoble face; but she regarded it with an anxious pity, mingled with thankfulness that she alone bore, and had strength to bear, the secret which would have overwhelmed him. For though, in truth, it was no worse for him than for all of us—we every one carry within us the seeds of death, and we are liable to it at any minute—still, to such a weak nature as Edward Scanlan's, and one who, despite his religious profession, shrank with dread from every chance of that "glory" which he was always preaching, the knowledge of such a fact as heart-disease concerning himself would almost have killed him with terror on the spot.

So once again his wife took up his burthen, and bore it for him—bore it all alone, to the very end.

"Then you are not going to church, after all?" said he, when, lifting his head, he per-

ceived that her bonnet was laid aside, and she was sitting quietly by him. "Now, that's kind of you, and I am glad. Only, will not the congregation think your absence rather peculiar?"

"Oh! I do not care for that."

"But you ought to care," said he, with sudden irritability. "I know I should have got on twice as well in the world if I had had a wife who minded outside things a little more."

Josephine flushed up in anger, then restrained herself.

"Perhaps so," she answered. "But, Edward, if I have not been a show wife, I have been a very practical and useful one, and I am willing to be of use now if you will let me."

"That's my good Josephine! Then we are friends again? You won't forsake me?—as I half thought you would. I have had such horrible fancies every night, of being arrested and sent to gaol, and dying there, and never seeing you any more. You won't let it come to that? You wouldn't like to have your husband shut up in a prison, among all sorts of nasty, unpleasant

people—oh, it would be dreadful! dreadful! You'll try to save me from it, Josephine?"

For ever so long he went maundering on thus, in an almost puerile fashion, not venturing to look his wife in the face, but clinging fast to her hand.

A man must be a man, to compel a woman's love. For a moment Josephine turned aside, and her sweet, proud, delicate mouth—the De Bougainville mouth, descending from generation to generation—even César had it—assumed a curl that Mr. Scanlan might not have liked to see; except that he would never have understood it. But immediately that deep pity, which long survives love, arose again in the wife's heart.

"My dear, we will not talk of prisons; perhaps it will not come to that. I might be able to devise some plan, if you would now tell me everything. Mind, Edward,—everything!"

"I have told you everything—except, perhaps, of my visit to Dr. Waters, which was quite a sudden idea. But it came to nothing, you see, as is always the case with me. Never was

there such an unlucky fellow in this world."

This was his constant cry, but she had ceased arguing against it now. She had ceased even to torture herself by counting up the large measure of happiness that might have been theirs—youth, health, children, settled work, and an income which, if small, was certain, and would have sufficed them to live on in comfort; but for that fatal something—the one rivet loose in the wheel—which her husband called his "ill luck!"

"Well, why are you silent? What are you thinking about? What do you suggest? For I tell you, Josephine, we are come to the last ebb—all is over with me, unless I can arrange about the assurance at once, say to-morrow. Come, you shall have your wish. I'll go to the assurance-office to-morrow."

Josephine's heart stood still. Then, looking another way, she said,

"It is not my wish now; I have changed my mind. I do not want you to assure your life."

“Well, that is a good joke ! After worrying me to death about it, abusing me like a pick-pocket because I wouldn’t do the thing, as soon as I decide to do it you turn round and say you don’t wish it at all ! You are the most fickle, changeable woman—but you women always are so : there’s no making you out.”

Josephine was silent.

“Unless”—with a sudden flash of that petty cunning which small natures mistake for penetration, and often fancy themselves very clever in attributing to others motives they would have had themselves—“unless, indeed, you have some deep-laid scheme of your own for managing me. But I won’t give in to it : I won’t be managed.”

“Oh ! mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !” murmured Josephine, using the exclamation not lightly, as many Frenchwomen do, she had been brought up too strictly Huguenot for that,—still using it without much meaning, only as a blind cry of misery in a tongue that her husband did not understand. “Listen to me, Edward,” she said

earnestly. "I have no deep-laid scheme, no underhand design; how should I have? My whole thought is for your good. It is true I have changed my mind, but one may do that sometimes, and find second thoughts best after all. This life assurance would cause you so much difficulty, so much trouble; and you know you don't like trouble."

"I hate it."

"And if I were to take the trouble from you—if I were to find a way of arranging the matter myself——"

"Oh! I wish you would, and let me never hear another word about it," said he, with a look of great relief, all his offended dignity having subsided in the great comfort it was to have his burden taken off his hands. "You are the cleverest woman I ever knew. You may have it all your own way if you like; I won't interfere. Only just tell me, as a matter of curiosity, my dear, how you mean to accomplish it."

It was a way which had slowly dawned upon her as the best—indeed the only way to meet

this crisis—by the plain truth. She meant to go over the accounts herself,—when first she married she hardly knew that two and two made four, but she was a very respectable arithmetician and book-keeper now,—to discover the exact deficit, and then confess it, simply and sorrowfully, to Mr. Langhorne. He was a very good man: she believed, if dealt with frankly, he would take the same view of things that she did—that her husband's act had been excessive carelessness rather than deliberate dishonesty. If it could be “hushed up”—oh! the agony it was to this honest woman that anything concerning any one belonging to her required to be hushed up!—for a time, she might be able to repay the money by settled monthly instalments out of her own earnings. Anything, everything, that she could do herself, she felt safe about; but all else was like shifting sands. Still, she thought Mr. Langhorne would trust her, and, slender as her relations with him had been, she had always found him kind and just: the sort of man upon whose generosity she

might throw herself, and not feel it pierce her like a reed.

But when she tried to explain all this to Mr. Scanlan, he was perfectly horrified. The direct truth was the last thing he ever thought of. Acknowledging a sin, and then resolving to retrieve it—the only way to reconcile justice and mercy, without which forgiveness becomes a sham, and charity mere weakness—was an idea quite beyond his comprehension. He only wished to hide guilt, to plaster it over, to keep it from the eye of the world; and then go on cheerfully as if it were not there. So as he escaped punishment, he was quite satisfied.

“No, Josephine,” said he, with the pig-headedness of all feeble souls; “this won’t do. The notion is perfectly absurd! What would Langhorne think of me? what would he think of you, owning that your husband had taken the money? No—no! If you are to help me, as you said you would, you must find out some other way to do it.”

“There is no other way,” she answered, still

calmly, though she knotted her fingers together in desperate self-control, and looked down at them, not at the face beside her, lest perchance she should loathe it—or despise it, which is worse even than loathing. “I have thought it all over and over, till my head has gone nearly wild, and it all comes to this: if you refuse to do as I suggest, or rather let me do it, there is nothing but ruin before you—ruin and disgrace.”

“The disgrace will not fall upon my head alone,” said he, almost triumphantly. “You should think of that before you forsake me. It will come upon you too, and the children.”

“Ah! I know that!” groaned the unfortunate wife: and could have cursed the day when she had been so mad as to marry; could have envied with her whole soul the childless women whom she had once used to pity. They at least had one consolation,—with them their miseries would end. They need not fear entailing upon innocent posterity the curse of a moral taint, worse than any physical disease.

Bridget Halloran once made to me a truly Irish remark,—that if she had the planning of a new world, she would arrange it so that all the men married and all the women remained single. Could faithful Bridget that day have looked through her kitchen ceiling at her dear mistress, I think she would have been strengthened in her opinion. It is not good for man to be alone, or woman either; but in that awful leap in the dark which both make when they marry, the precipice is much deeper on the woman's side. A lonely life may be sad, but to be tied to either a fool or a scoundrel is not merely sad, it is maddening.

Josephine Scanlan looked half mad; there was a glare almost amounting to frenzy in her black eyes, as she sat pulling to and fro, up and down, till she almost pulled it off her finger, the thin gold circlet, origin and sign of so many years of unhappiness past, of untold wretchedness to come. Once more the desperate chance of retrieving all by flight flashed across her mind, and vanished. To leave him there, in his

lowest ebb of ill-fortune, forlorn, dishonoured, unconsciously doomed. It would be what to Josephine seemed almost worse than wicked,—cowardly.

“I can’t go,” she said to herself. “Perhaps, if I have patience, I may see a way out of this. Oh, if I had any one to show it to me, to help me in the smallest degree! But there is no one—no one in this wide world.”

And so, by a strange and sudden thought—one of those divine promptings that none believe in but those who have them—the miserable woman was driven to seek for help beyond this world. She covered her face with her hands, and did—what Josephine seldom did for herself, though she taught it to her little children as a sort of necessary duty every night—she “said her prayers;” using her children’s formula, “Our Father which art in heaven.” In heaven—and oh so far, so terribly, cruelly far, as it seemed to her—from this forlorn earth.

The doctrine of “answers to prayer,” literal and material, always appeared to me egregious

folly or conceited profanity. Is the great Ruler of the universe to stop its machinery for me? Is the wise evolution of certain events from certain causes, continuing unerringly its mysterious round, by which all things come alike to all, and for the final good of all—to be upset in its workings for my individual benefit? No; I would not, I dare not believe such a thing. But I do believe in the Eternal Spirit's influence upon our spirits, in momentous crises, and in a very distinct and solemn way, often remembered for years, as Mrs. Scanlan afterwards remembered this.

At the very moment when she sat hiding her face, and trying to feel if there was any reality in the prayers she had silently uttered, she heard through the silence the far-off sound of Ditchley church bell. Not the church-going bell—it had ceased an hour or more ago—but the slow measured toll by which the parish was accustomed to learn that one of their neighbours had just departed—gone into that world of which we talk so much and know so little.

“That’s the passing-bell,” cried Mr. Scanlan, starting up. “Who can it be for? Just count the tolls.”

For in Ditchley, as in some other parishes in England, it was customary to ring out the number of tolls corresponding to the age of the person who had died.

Josephine counted up to eighty; past it. There was scarcely any one in Ditchley of such advanced years, except the Rector. She sat stupefied. Her husband also, with a certain kind of awe in his face, again felt for her hand, whispering, “Can it be Mr. Oldham?”

Two minutes after, she heard the children come in, much too early, from church. Adrienne and Gabrielle were both in tears, and César, looking very grave, repeated the tidings which had reached the church during sermon-time, and been communicated from the pulpit, sending a thrill of solemnity, if nothing more, throughout the congregation.

Mrs. Scanlan heard, and sat down where she stood, as white and still as a stone. The end

had come at last, of suffering to him, of suspense to her : Mr. Oldham was dead.

He had died quite quietly and unexpectedly, César said ; for the boy, knowing his mother was fond of their old friend, had had the thoughtfulness to run up at once to the Rectory and inquire all particulars. There was no struggle, no apparent pain. The spirit had escaped, like a bird out of its cage—spread its invisible wings, and flown away. Did it look back, smiling, on that poor woman, come now to the very last ebb of her despair ?

Actual grief for Mr. Oldham's death was impossible. It was scarcely one of those departures when friends hang over the bed of the beloved lost,

“Not thankful that his troubles are no more.”

Here, even the tenderest friend must rejoice that his troubles were no more ; that he was released from the heavy clog of the body, and from a life which could never be any joy or use to himself or others—only a miserable burthen and pain. For, sad as it is to see a still youth-

ful mind writhing in the fetters of a worn-out, aged body, sadder still is the climax which must soon have come to poor Mr. Oldham, when the body outlives the mind, and the thing we at last bury seems only a body, a mere clod of the valley, a helpless corruption, better hidden out of sight. In such circumstances it is difficult to regain the feeling of still-existing spirit, separate from clay. It is only after a while, as the associations of sickness and mortality grow fainter, that the dead seem to come alive again, in all their old identity; and the farther years part us from them, the nearer they appear. Not as dead and buried, but as living dwellers in a far country, to which we too are bound, and for which we wait patiently, even cheerfully, hearing, louder and clearer as we approach thereto, the roll of the dividing seas.

When the first awe was over—the first natural tears shed for the dead who could return no more—an unwonted lightness crept into Josephine's heart. Her present terror was at any rate staved off; Mr. Langhorne would be for

some weeks too much engrossed in the arrangement of Mr. Oldham's affairs to go into the school-accounts, and meantime what changes might not come? Might it not possibly be true, that golden dream which had grown so dim through long delay? Could she be the Rector's heiress after all?

A week ago she had thought her misery rendered her indifferent to this, and all things else that might befall; but human nature has wonderful powers of reaction, and Josephine's nature especially. In her there was an irrepressible hopefulness which nothing could kill. Still this very hope made her suspense the more intolerable.

Her promise to Mr. Oldham bound her only until his death; she was therefore now free to unburden all her hopes and fears to her husband. But she never thought of so doing. Even had there been no other reason, the horrible strain it was upon her own mind during the interval that elapsed between the death and the funeral—for Mr. Langhorne and Dr. Waters,

who, as executors, had everything in their own hands, insisted upon waiting a week for Lady Emma and Mr. Lascelles, neither of whom came after all—this week of miserable restlessness, during which she could do nothing, think of nothing, but calculate the chances of her fate, convinced Josephine that she must preserve her secret to the last. If it came to nothing, the shock would be more than Mr. Scanlan could bear. If it were true, he would be a little angry with her perhaps ; but no—the husband of an heiress, especially when he is a man like Edward Scanlan, was not likely to be very angry with his wife, or for very long.

And during this interminable week, when the Rector lay dead—nay, rather, as Josephine often tenderly thought, was alive again—the Curate seemed to appear his best self, both at home and abroad. Perhaps he was anxious to cultivate his chances of the living, or perhaps—let us give him credit for the best motive possible—he was really touched by the death which, he could not help seeing, affected his wife so

much. He was very little at Wren's Nest, to her great thankfulness; he had of course much additional business to transact, but whenever he did come home he was good and kind. And he never made the least allusion to the impending storm: which perhaps, being temporarily lifted off, he deluded himself would never come; that, in his usual phrase, something would "turn up" to protect him from the consequences of what he had done amiss. That was all he cared for. His life was an appropriate carrying out in this world of the belief he held regarding the other—the all-importance of what is termed "personal salvation;"—a doctrine held by many true and sincere Christians, which only proves that they themselves are far nobler than their doctrine, and that the spirit of God within us is a diviner thing than any external and nominal creed.

It showed the extreme self-control to which Josephine, so impulsive and passionate in her youth, had attained, that even quick-sighted

Bridget noticed nothing remarkable in her mistress during this momentous week, at least, nothing more than great quietness of manner, and a wish to escape observation, and be as much alone as possible. She remained in the closed house—closed out of respect to the departed: and scarcely quitted it until after dark, when she would rush for a hasty walk across the common, refusing even her son César's company. Perhaps an eye more familiar with the signs of mental suffering than the poor servant's might have noticed how thin she grew in those seven days—what a tension there was in her features—what an unnatural metallic ring in her voice: but at the time no suspicion was roused: she kept her secret faithfully to the last.

The week's end came at length. The final night—the night before the funeral—Mrs. Scanlan slept as soundly as a child, or a criminal before execution; only she had no feeling of guilt, whatever happened. Her act of concealment had been deliberate, conscientious: if it were all to do over again, she felt she could but

have done the same thing under the same circumstances.

Believing this, she was utterly indifferent to praise or blame, either from her neighbours, or those of her own household. The only matter of moment which troubled her was the fact itself—so long a certainty though unknown—but which in a few hours must be known to herself and all the world—the little busy world of Ditchley.

She had been invited to the funeral, as companion to Lady Emma, who at first had wished to go, but afterwards declined. Mr. Langhorne had also expressed formally a wish that Mrs. as well as Mr. Scanlan should be present at the reading of the will; but at the last moment her husband declared she should not go.

“Why not?” asked she.

“Oh! Lady Emma’s absence shows she thought it not decorous for ladies to attend funerals, and I think so too,” said the Curate, dogmatically; and after a good deal of beating about the bush, he came out with his second

reason—her mourning was not handsome enough.

Not daring to run into debt for a new gown, she had made an old one do. As she stood in it, its long folds clinging tightly to her wasted, rather angular figure, her husband looked sharply, critically, at his once beautiful wife. If her beauty had been the sole spell that enchained him, Edward Scanlan was a free man now.

“What a fright you do make of yourself sometimes, Josephine! I wish you wouldn’t. I wish you would remember it is my credit that depends on your appearance. When you dress shabbily, it is a reflection upon me. Indeed you cannot go as you are to the funeral. It would be a want of respect to Mr. Oldham.”

“He would not feel it so; he knew me better,” she answered gently. “And I should like to see him laid to rest; should like to come back with you to the Rectory and hear his will read.”

“Nonsense; it cannot concern us. He liked me so little of late, I doubt if he has even left

me ten pounds to buy a mourning-ring. I must go, I suppose, as a mere matter of form, but you need not. Women are far better out of all these things."

Josephine grew seriously troubled. Her presence at the funeral was not necessary, but at the reading of the will undoubtedly it was. Not to shorten her own suspense—that mattered little—but to "take care," as Dr. Waters had said, of her husband; to whom any shock of sudden tidings, either good or bad, would be injurious.

"Edward," she said, "I want to go. Don't hinder me. It cannot signify to you."

Yes, he protested, it did signify. People might make remarks; might say that Mrs. Scanlan pushed herself where she had no business to be, and that Mr. Scanlan was always tied to his wife's apron-string. He insisted upon her staying at home. There had come over him one of those dogged fits, peculiar to

"Man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,"

that his authority must be exercised. When he got into this mood—common to human beings and asses—Edward Scanlan could neither be led nor driven, but was bent upon taking his own way, just because it was his way.

Josephine sat down in despair. To thwart her husband's will openly was impossible, to submit to it most dangerous. As he dressed himself carefully in his new black suit and unexceptionable white cravat—whosoever went shabby at Wren's Nest, its master never did—talking complacently all the while of his own popularity, of the universal wish there was that he should step into the dead man's shoes, his wife was almost silent, absorbed in the imminent crisis wherein it behoved her to be so cautious and so calm.

Presently she made a last effort.

“Edward,” she said, as imploringly as if she had been the meekest and weakest of women, “do take me with you. I want to go.”

But, upborne on his huge wave of self-content, Mr. Scanlan was immoveable.

“I have said it, and I won’t unsay it. Josephine, your going is perfect nonsense, and you shall not go. I cannot allow it.”

“But——”

“Am I master in my own house, or not? If not, henceforth I will be. Stop, not another word!”

“Very well,” she said, and let him depart without another word.

Otherwise, she would have lost all control of herself—have flung desperately at him the secret which she had kept so long—perhaps even have betrayed that other, which, though only two weeks old, seemed to have lasted for years. It was the only thing which restrained her now.

What if anything should happen—anything which might harm him—and she had let him go from her in anger, had parted from him in this great crisis without a word or a kiss? Present, her husband sometimes tormented her to an unendurable degree; but, absent, the poor heart went back, often self-reproachfully, to its

old fealty, and tried to think the best of him that it could.

Sitting at her bed-room window, Josephine listened to the funeral bell tolling across the dreary common. It had rained all day, but there was now a faint clearing up towards the west, giving a hope that the ceremony—which had been put off as late in the day as possible, to allow the poor parishioners to follow to his grave one who had been to them invariably charitable and kind—might be less gloomy than a wet October funeral always is. She seemed to see it all—to hear the splash of the assembling feet in the muddy churchyard, and the sound of her husband's voice reading impressively and sonorously, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," words which to her were as yet mere words, no more.

When the bell ceased, Bridget and the younger children, who had stood at the gate listening, came in, and Mrs. Scanlan was summoned to tea. Mechanically she poured it out, hearing absently the talk around her, which was at first

rather subdued: the little people had almost forgotten him, still they knew their mother was fond of Mr. Oldham. But soon they grew quite lively again; they were always so lively when Papa was out.

And thus time passed, Josephine hardly knew how, till Bridget entered to ask if she should bring in candles.

Then the intolerable suspense became too much for human strength to fight against. Come what would, she must go to the Rectory. Her two eldest boys had returned, having watched the funeral from a distance, and had settled to their evening's employment. The natural thing would have been to say to them, "Children, your papa has not come back; I am going to meet him;" but then she knew her boy César, who had a great idea of protecting his mother, would insist upon accompanying her. So she stole out of the back door like a thief, avoiding even Bridget, though she fancied Bridget saw her, and flew rather than walked, in the wind and rain and darkness, across the common, and

through Ditchley streets. No one was abroad ; the day had been one of those funeral holidays which seem like Sunday ; the shops were still half-closed, and behind them Mrs. Scanlan saw little groups sitting, discussing their good old Rector, no doubt, and wondering who would be their new one.

Presently she found herself at the Rectory gate—the same gate over which had leaned the shrewd, kind, old face, when Mr. Oldham had said those momentous words about her being “his heiress.” Were they true or not ? The fact must be known by this time. And surely, in that case, Mr. Scanlan would have come straight home. Why had he not come home ? Had anything happened ? And a forewarning of that daily fear which she must henceforth live in—could tell to no one, could seek help for from no one—struck through her like a bolt of ice.

There was but one road to the Rectory ; she could not have missed him, he must be still there. But now she had come she dared not go in.

What reason could she give for her coming? How explain, even to the servant that should open the door, why she stood there, drenched with rain, shivering with cold and fear, looking, she was well aware, more like a madwoman than the respectable Curate's respectable wife? No—she must wait a little longer. Nothing might have happened—neither good nor bad: Mr. Scanlan might have just stayed to hear the will read, and then gone somewhere or other to spend the evening instead of coming home.

There was a large tree which overhung the gate: there Josephine sheltered and hid herself, till the soaking rain dropped through the thin leaves. Years afterwards, when she had almost forgotten what it felt like to walk in the cold and wet, when she went clad in silk and furs, and trod daintily from carpeted halls to cushioned carriages, hardly knowing what it was to be unattended or alone, Josephine used to recall, as in a sort of nightmare, that poor creature—scarcely herself at all—who crouched shivering under the tree at the Rectory-gate; trembling

lest anybody should see her, wondering if even God himself saw her, or whether His eyes had not long been shut upon her and her misery. And the rain beat, and the wind blew—the wild, salt-tasted wind, coming westward from the sea—and, quarter after quarter, the dull clang of Ditchley church-clock rang out from over the Rector's newly-closed grave the hours that to him were nothing now—to her, everything.

It was half-past nine at least, and she was wet through and through, yet still felt that she could not go back, and that to go forward was equally impossible, when she heard wheels through the dark, driving slowly from the house to the gate. When the light came, she saw it was Dr. Waters's brougham. He was in it; with some other gentleman, whom he seemed to be supporting.

Josephine sprang to the carriage-door, and shook its closed windows with such eager appeal that the doctor turned round angrily:—

“Go away, woman! Good God, Mrs. Scanlan is that you?”

"Yes, it is I. Is not that my husband?"

A feeble voice answered, and a still feebler hand was put out :

"Josephine, come in here. I want you."

"Yes, come in at once. Take my place; I will walk home," said Dr. Waters, getting out, and then told her that Mr. Scanlan had had a slight fainting-fit; something had occurred which startled him very much; but he was much better now, and would be well directly.

Josephine looked from one to the other, half-bewildered.

"My dear lady, I had better explain: it was no ill news, quite the contrary; and your husband will soon get over the shock of it. I wish you had been here," he added, a little coldly; "it was a pity, as Mr. Scanlan says, that your feelings did not allow you to be present at the funeral, and the reading of the will, which Langhorne particularly desired; and he was the only person who knew about this matter. Mrs. Scanlan, I have to congratulate you. You are Mr. Oldham's heiress."

Josephine bent her head assentingly—that was all.

“It is a very large property ; worth a hundred thousand pounds, I should say. Except a few legacies, it is all yours.”

“Josephine, do you hear ? all ours !” gasped Mr. Scanlan, pressing forward. “A hundred thousand pounds ! We are rich—rich for life !”

Again she assented ; but, in truth, hardly did hear : she only saw that grey, pinched face, drawn with pain, those shaking hands, which seemed already to clutch eagerly at the imaginary gold.

With gentle force, Dr. Waters helped her into the carriage, and was gone. Then she took her husband’s head on her shoulder, and his hands in hers ; thus they sat, without speaking, as the carriage slowly moved homewards.

It had come at last—this golden dream. As Edward had said, they were rich—rich for life ; richer than in her wildest ambition she had ever desired. She could hardly realize it at all. The

fortune had come : but what was the worth of it to her, or hers ?

By and by her husband roused himself a little.

“Who would have thought it, Josephine ? I was so startled, it quite knocked me over ; however, I am better now, very much better. Soon I shall come all right and enjoy everything.”

“I hope so.”

“But you—you speak so oddly ! Are you not delighted with our good luck ?—or rather yours, for Mr. Oldham has so tied his money up that I can’t touch it, and I have almost nothing to do with it. He maintained his dislike to me to the last. And to think of his saying not a word about what he had done. Nobody knew but Langhorne, unless”—with a sudden shrill suspicion in his tone—“unless you did ?”

In her state of terrible suspense, Mrs. Scanlan had not paused to consider what course she should pursue, when the suspense ended, let it end either way ; nor had decided, whether or

not she should tell her husband the whole circumstances, which were so difficult of explanation. Taken by surprise, she stammered—hesitated.

“You did know—I am sure of it.”

“Yes,” she answered, slowly and humbly, very humbly. “Mr. Oldham told me himself; though I hardly believed it. Still, he did tell me.”

“When?”

“Seven years ago.”

“Seven years! You have kept this secret from me—your own husband—for seven years! Josephine, I’ll never forgive you—never believe in you any more.”

And she—what could she say? To ask his pardon would be a mere pretence, for she felt herself not guilty; to explain her motives was useless, since he could not understand them. So this “lucky” husband and wife, whom all Ditchley was now talking over, wondering at or envying their good fortune, turned away

from one another, and drove home to Wren's Nest together without exchanging another word.

CHAPTER XIV.

DITCHLEY opened its eyes wide with unfeigned astonishment when it learned that its sometime curate was suddenly transformed into the Reverend Edward Scanlan of Oldham Court, master of a fortune which, even allowing for gossiping exaggerations, was still sufficient to make him a county magnate for the rest of his days. True, his position was in one sense merely nominal, Mr. Oldham having taken the precaution to tie the fortune safely up in the hands of two trustees, Dr. Waters and Mr. Langhorne, so that Mr. Scanlan had little more to do than to receive twice a year his annual income, while the principal was secured to his wife and children. But these arrangements were kept private, especially by himself: and

he burst out, full-blown, as the ostensible owner of one of the finest estates and most picturesque mansions in the county.

Oldham Court, one of the few Elizabethan houses now remaining in England, had remained, almost unaltered, both within and without, for generations. Its late possessor had never lived in it, but had carefully preserved it, just as it was—letting the land round it to a gentleman-farmer, and by good management doubling the value of the property. The house itself, with the little church adjoining, wherein slept generations of Oldhams, was far away from town or village: Ditchley, eleven miles off, being its nearest link to civilization. But it sat in the midst of a lovely country, hilly though not bleak, solitary yet not dreary: the sort of region to which any lover of nature is speedily attracted, and loves with a strong adhesiveness that people who live in streets and squares, or in neighbourhoods without any salient characteristics, cannot in the least understand. And though

Mr. Oldham had never resided there—at least never since he had inherited it—from the wording of his last will he had evidently loved it much.

In his will he expressly desired that the Scanlans should immediately remove thither: that, unless upon great emergency, it should neither be sold nor rebuilt, but that Mrs. Scanlan should inhabit it just as it was, as long as she lived. That, in short, it should be made into the family home of a new family, which should replace the extinct Oldhams.

To account for his having chosen Mrs. Scanlan as his heiress, various old tales were raked up, and added as excrescences to the obvious truth;—such as Mr. Oldham's having been once in love with a Frenchwoman, Mrs. Scanlan's mother, or aunt, or cousin—nobody quite knew which. There might or might not have been a grain of fact at the bottom of these various fictions: but they were never verified: and common-sense people soon took the common-sense view of the subject, namely, that when a

man has no heirs he is quite right in choosing for himself what Providence has denied him, and endowing with his fortune the most suitable person he can find : who is also the one to whom it will do most good, and who will do most good with it. And these qualifications, every one agreed, were combined in Mrs. Scanlan.

It was a curious fact, showing how in course of years all people find their level, even in the eyes of the outside world—that no surprise was expressed at Ditchley because Mr. Oldham left his fortune to Mrs. Scanlan rather than to her husband ; indeed some people sagely remarked “that it was just as well.” This was all : for Mr. Scanlan still retained much of his old popularity : and besides many who would have been ready enough to criticize the poor curate at Wren’s Nest, looked with lenient eyes on the master of Oldham Court.

The migration was accomplished speedily ; Mr. Scanlan himself taking little part therein. He was in feeble health for some weeks after

the shock of his good fortune : so that he had to leave to his wife the management of everything. He left to her, almost without a single inquiry, the management of one thing—which, with terrified haste, she accomplished within the first few days of her new inheritance. She got possession of the school-accounts, went over them, found the exact amount of her husband's defalcations, and replaced it out of a sum which she obtained from her trustees for her own immediate use. Then she breathed freely. There had been but a hair's breadth between her and ruin—that utter ruin which lost honour brings : but the crisis was over, and she had escaped.

He had escaped, that is : but she had ceased to divide, even in thought, her own and her husband's fortunes. The strong line which needs to be drawn between deliberate wickedness and mere weakness—even though they often arrive at the same sad end—she now saw clear. She never for a moment disguised from herself what sort a man Ed-

ward Scanlan was—but as long as she could protect him from himself, and protect her children from him, she did not fear.

It was with a full heart—fuller than anybody dreamed of—that she left Wren's Nest and its associations behind for ever. The very words "for ever" seemed to hallow them, and make her shrink with pain when Mr. Scanlan declared that he "shook the dust of it from off his feet, and hoped he might never again re-enter that horrid hole." But she said nothing; and drove by her husband's side, in their own comfortable carriage, across the smiling country, to the old gateway of Oldham Court.

It so chanced she had never seen the place before. Mr. Oldham had sometimes planned to take her there, but the visit had never come about: now at the very first sight, her heart leaped to it, as the ideal home for which she had been craving for all her days. Grey, quiet, lonely,—with its quaint old-fashioned gables, and long low Tudor windows—no palatial residence or baronial hall, but just a house—a house to live .

in, and to live in contentedly till one died—Josephine felt with a sudden thrill of ineffable thankfulness that here indeed was her rest; where no storms could come, and out of which no cruel hands would uproot her again. For surely now her husband would be satisfied. She asked him the question.

“Satisfied? Well—yes. A nice house; but rather queer-looking and old-fashioned. What a pity we are obliged to keep it as it is, and cannot pull it down and build it up afresh as a modern residence.”

“Do you think so?” was all Mrs. Scanlan replied. She never argued with her husband now.

At the door stood all her children waiting—a goodly group; justifying Mr. Oldham’s choice of the family which should succeed his own. Behind them was an array of new servants, men and women, with Bridget at their head—Bridget now promoted to “Mrs. Halloran,” and having with true Irish adaptability taken her place at once as confidential servant and follower

of the family. A position greatly against her master's liking : indeed he had proposed pensioning her off, and despatching her at once to Ireland, till he considered that a "follower" implied a "family:" and to be able to speak of "our housekeeper who has been with us twenty years," gave a certain character of antique respectability to his establishment. Therefore, as he passed her in her black silk dress and neat cap—Bridget was, especially in her latter days, that rare but not impossible anomaly, a tidy Irishwoman—he acknowledged her curtsy with a patronising "How d'ye do?" and said no more concerning her proposed dismissal.

Theoretically and poetically, the sudden translation from poverty to riches is quite easy, natural, and agreeable : practically it is not so. Let a family be ever so refined and aristocratic, still if it has been brought up in indigence, its habits will have caught some tinge of the untoward circumstances through which it has had to struggle. I once knew a lady who confessed that she found it difficult to learn to order her

servant to “bring candles” instead of “the candle:” and no doubt the Scanlan family on its first accession to wealth were exposed to similar perplexities.

The younger branches, especially, found their splendid new shoes rather troublesome wear. Accustomed to the glorious freedom of poverty, they writhed a little under their gilded chains. They quarrelled with the new nurses, made fun of the dignified butler and footman, and altogether gave so much trouble that it was a relief when, César having already gone to Oxford, the two other boys were sent off to school, and the three girls alone remained to brighten Oldham Court. But with these, despite all their father’s arguments about the propriety of sending them to a fashionable London boarding-school, the mother point-blank refused to part. A governess was procured—the best attainable : and so the domestic chaos was gradually reduced to order.

This done, and when she grew accustomed to see her children in their new position : no longer

running wild like village boys and girls, but well-dressed, well-taught, and comporting themselves like a gentleman's sons and daughters, their mother's heart swelled with exultant joy. Her seven years of terrible suspense seemed blotted out: and her future—her children's future, for she had long ceased to have any other—stretched itself out before her clear as a sunshiny landscape. The happiness was worth the pain.

It had only been her own pain after all. Now she sometimes smiled, half bitterly, to think what useless pangs had wrung her tender conscience about keeping that secret from her husband. He himself did not seem to feel it in the least. After the first outburst of wounded vanity, he had never once referred to the subject; seemed, indeed, to have quite lost sight of it. To do him justice, he was not one to "bear malice, as the phrase is; he forgot his injuries as quickly as he did his blessings. Besides, so many sensitive troubles are avoided, and so many offences condoned, by people whose law of conduct is—

not what is right or wrong, but what is expedient.

Therefore, as soon as he recovered full health, which he did to all appearance ere long, Mr. Scanlan began to enjoy his changed fortunes amazingly; accepting them not so much as a gift, but a debt long owed to him by a tardy Providence. Within a few months—nay, weeks—he had ignored his Ditchley life as completely as the butterfly does his chrysalis exuviae, and burst out full-winged as the master of Oldham Court. He talked about “my place” as if he had possessed it all his days; only grumbling sometimes at the house itself—its dulness, its distance from any town, and, above all, its old-fashionedness. Edward Scanlan, who had been brought up in that phase of modern luxury in which the cost of a thing constitutes its sole value, did not approve of the Gothic style at all.

But to his wife, from the first minute she crossed its threshold, Oldham Court felt like home—her home, till death, and that of her de-

scendants after her. For she had come to that time of life when we begin involuntarily to look forward to our own secession in favour of the young, coming lives, who will carry on into futurity this dream of our life—which already begins to seem to us “like a shadow that departeth;” and backwards on those past generations to whom we shall ere long descend. Thus even while thinking of her children and children’s children who would inherit this place, Josephine, wandering about it, often saw it peopled with innumerable gentle ghosts, into whose empty seats her bright, living, young flock had climbed. She felt a great tenderness over these long-dead Oldhams; and took pains to identify and preserve the family portraits which still hung in hall and staircase. In her idle hours, only too numerous now, she liked to go and sit in the little church, which was so close to the house that, much to her husband’s horror, one of the dining-room windows looked on to the churchyard. He had it boarded up immediately; but still, from her bed-

room casement, Josephine would, of moonlight nights, or in early sunrises, gaze upon that tiny God's acre, and think, almost with a sense of pleasure, that she should one day be buried there.

These vanished Oldhams, they slept in peace—from the cross-legged Crusader with his hound at his feet, to the two mediæval spouses, kneeling, headless, side by side, and behind each a long train of offspring; and then on through many generations to the last one—Mr. Oldham's father, over whom a very ugly angel, leaning on a draperied arm, kept watch and ward. Mrs. Scanlan often amused herself with making out the inscriptions, old English or Latin,—she had taught herself Latin, to teach her boys. These epitaphs were touching memorials of a family which, though not exactly noble, had been evidently honourable and honoured to the last. Necessarily so, or it could not have kept itself so long afloat on the deep sea of oblivion; for it is astonishing how quickly a race which has in it the element of degradation and de-

may can dwindle down from nobility to obscurity.

As she pondered over these relics of an extinct but not degenerate race, Josephine felt stirring strangely in her the blood of the old De Bougainvilles. The desire to found, or to revive, a family ; to live again after death in our unknown descendants ; to plan for them, toil for them, and bequeath to them the fruit of our toils—a passion for which many men have sacrificed so much—came into this woman's heart with a force such as few men could understand, because thereto was added the instinct of motherhood. Her ambition—for, as I have said, she was ambitious,—quenched inevitably as regarded the present, passed on to the days when, she and their father sleeping in peace together, her children should succeed to those possessions which she herself could never fully enjoy. Especially she used to dream of the time when César, reigning in her stead, should be master of Oldham Court.

“ Yes,” she thought, “ my son ”—she usually

called her eldest boy "my son,"—must marry early : he will be able to afford it. And he must choose some girl after my own heart, to whom I will be such a good mother-in-law. And oh ! how proud I shall be of the third generation !"

Thus planned she—thus dreamed she ; looking far into the future, with stone-blind eyes, as we all of us look. Still, I think it made her happy—happier than she had been for many years.

One little cloud, however, soon rose on her bright horizon : strangely bright now, for in the sudden novelty of things, in the great relief and ease of his present lot, and in his power of getting every luxury he wished for, even Mr. Scanlan seemed to have taken a new turn, and to give his wife no trouble whatever ! He was actually contented ! He ceased to find fault with anything, became amenable to reason, and absolutely affectionate. His good angel—who, I suppose, never quite deserts any man—stood behind him, shaking ambrosial odour over him,

and consequently over the whole family, for at least three months after their change of fortune.

And then the little cloud arose. The three Misses Scanlan, now requiring to be educated up to the level of the county families, amongst whose young ladies they would have to take their place, were put under a first-rate governess, who had, necessarily, a rather forcing system. It worked well with Gabrielle and Catherine—clever, handsome, healthy creatures, who learnt wholesomely and fast; but with Adrienne, now nearly old enough to enter society, the case was altogether different.

Alas, poor Adrienne! she would never be a show daughter to introduce into the world. She was neither a bright girl nor a pretty girl; nay, her appearance was almost worse than insignificant, for her poor weak spine had grown a little awry, and stooping over her studies made it much worse. Already she required to have her figure padded and disguised in various ingenious ways, which took all her mother's French

skill to devise; and already her gentle pale face had the sad look peculiar to deformed people.

Of this she herself was painfully conscious. Beside her mother's stately dignity, and her sister Gabrielle's reedlike grace, she knew well how ill she looked, and this made her shy and shrinking from society. Other things, which she was only too quick to find out, added to this feeling.

"I can't imagine why you are always wanting Adrienne in the drawing-room," her father would say, not always out of the girl's hearing. "She does not care to come, and really she is not very ornamental. Keep her in the shade—by all means keep her in the shade."

And into the shade Adrienne instinctively retired, even from the first day she set foot in Oldham Court, especially when there happened to be visitors—a circumstance that occurred seldom enough,—which much surprised and displeased Mr. Scanlan.

"Of course everybody will call upon us—all

the county families, I mean," he kept saying ; and impressed upon his wife that at certain hours every day she was to sit prepared for their reception. Indeed, he was always laying down the law of etiquette for her in minute things, and telling her that she did not properly recognise her position. "For, my dear, you have been so long out of the world—if, indeed, you were ever fairly in it—that you cannot be expected to understand the ways of society as I do."

"Possibly not," she would answer, half amused, yet with a lurking sarcasm in her smile.

But she obeyed, for it really was not worth her while to disobey. She never cared to quarrel over small things.

Visitors came : only, alas ! they were principally Ditchley people, driving over in hired flies and pony-chaises ; not a single carriage and pair had as yet passed under the Gothic gateway. Nevertheless, Mrs. Scanlan welcomed her guests with all sorts of kindly attentions.

“Why should I not?” said she, when her husband remonstrated; “they were friendly to me when I was poor. Besides, they are all worthy people, and I like them.”

“Which are not sufficient reasons for cultivating them, and I desire that they may not be cultivated any more than you can help,” said Mr. Scanlan, with the slightly dictatorial tone which he sometimes used now.

Josephine flushed up, but made no answer. Indeed, she rarely did make answers now to things of which she disapproved. It was astonishing how little of actual conversation—the rational, pleasant, and improving talk which even husbands and wives can sometimes find time to indulge in, and which makes the quietest life a continual entertainment—passed between this husband and wife, who had been married so many years.

Just when his eager expectation of visitors—suitable visitors—had changed into angry surprise that they never came, Mr. Scanlan entered the house one day in eager excitement.

He had met on the road the two young sons of his nearest neighbour, the Earl of Turberville, coming to call, they said, and ask permission to shoot over his preserves.

“I should have invited them to lunch, but I feared you would not have it nice enough; however, they have promised to come to-morrow. So be sure, Josephine, that you have everything in apple-pie order, and dress yourself elegantly” (he still, when excited, pronounced it “iligantly”). “For who knows but the Earl and Countess themselves might come. Mr. Stoneleigh—the Honourable Mr. Stoneleigh, you know—said his father had something very particular to say to me.”

And for the next twenty-four hours poor Mr. Scanlan was in a perpetual fidget, worrying his butler and footman; till they civilly hinted that they had always lived in high families, and knew their own business; and especially worrying his wife, who did not participate in this idolatrous worship of rank and title, which had

always been a strong characteristic of the Irish curate. Long before luncheon time, he insisted upon her taking her seat in the drawing-room : dressed with elegance, certainly, though not with half the splendour he desired.

“Ah !” said he, sighing ; “you may take a horse to the water, but you can’t make him drink. I fear, Josephine, I shall never succeed in raising you to the level of your present position. I give you up !”

The hour arrived, but not the guests ; and, after waiting till three o’clock, Mrs. Scanlan insisted on going into luncheon. She had scarcely taken her place there when the two lads entered—rather roughly clad and roughly behaved lads, apparently, until they caught sight of the lady at the head of the table. Then, their instinctive good-breeding told them that they had been guilty of a discourtesy and a mistake. They were full of apologies, for being so unwarrantably late ; but they gave no reason for their tardiness, and neither made a single excuse for the non-appearance of the Earl and

Countess ; indeed, seemed not to have an idea that these latter were expected. Nor did Josephine refer to the fact, being long accustomed to her husband's great powers of imagination.

She rather liked the youths, who were fresh from Eton—pleasant, gentlemanly fellows ; and conversation soon became easy and general. The elder tried in various quiet ways to find out who Mrs. Scanlan was, and how she came to inherit Oldham Court. At last he put the question whether she was not distantly related to Mr. Oldham ; and when his curiosity gained only a brief No, he covered his confusion by darting into a long explanation of how the Oldhams and Turbervilles were the most ancient families in the country, and had gone on quarrelling, intermarrying, and quarrelling again, ever since William the Conqueror.

“They were Saxons and we Normans, so we could not help fighting, you know.”

“Of course not,” said Mrs. Scanlan, and turned the conversation by some unimport-

ant remark ; but Mr. Scanlan brought it back eagerly.

“My wife also is of Norman descent. She comes of the Vicomtes de Bougainville—a very old and honourable family.”

“Oh !” replied the young man ; and added, with a slight bow, “Cela va sans dire.”

“What was that the Honourable Mr. Stoneleigh said ?” inquired the host ; but the hostess, with a hot cheek—alas ! her cheeks burnt very often during that afternoon—stopped the answer by inquiring if they had ever been abroad, and so leading the talk widely astray from herself and her ancestors.

Calm as she sat—looking, in her fine Gothic dining-hall, like a mediæval picture—she sat, nevertheless, upon thorns the whole time. For it was the first time for many years that she had seen her husband as he appeared in general society, and the sight was not agreeable. The court suit of prosperity is only becoming to courtly figures. Many a man, decent enough in common broad-cloth, when dressed up in

velvet and point lace, looks painfully like a footman. Corporeally—or I should say sartorially—fate had denied Mr. Scanlan the pleasure of wearing bright colours; “Once a clergyman, always a clergyman,” being unfortunately, English law. But in his manners he assumed a costume of startling vividness and variety. “All things to all men,” was his maxim, and he carried it out with great unction; appearing by turns as the gentleman of fashion, of wealth, and of family; never knowing exactly which character to assume, for all were equally assumptions, and equally unfamiliar. The simple plan of avoiding all difficulties, by being always one’s own honest self, did not occur to this ingenious Irishman.

He could not help it—it was his nature. But it was none the less painful to those belonging to him. People tell of the penitential horsehair which lovely women have worn under their velvet and minever, cambric and lawn. I think I could tell of one woman who knew what it was to wear it too.

When the guests and Mr. Scanlan had quitted the drawing-room, Adrienne crept in there, and her mother, who was standing at the window watching the shadows come and go over the hill-sides, wistfully—as we look at the view that we hope to watch unchanged until we die—felt her daughter take her hand. She turned round immediately.

“My little girl!” stroking her hair—Adrienne had very pretty hair; Bridget often used to talk of it with sad pride—“My little girl, I wonder if you will ever be married! I almost hope not.” Then she added, quickly, “Because I should miss you so; and, besides, women can live quite happily without ever being married.”

“I know they can; above all when they have got such a dear mother to live for as mine,” said Adrienne, tenderly, but turning rosy-red as she spoke; so that Mrs. Scanlan, a little surprised at the child’s sensitiveness, changed the conversation immediately. She even repented having alluded to a subject upon which Adrienne could

as yet only have theorised. Though she was nearly seventeen, she was still very childish; and she had scarcely spoken to a young man in her life. Except Mr. Summerhayes, who, compared with her, was not a young man at all.

This Mr. Summerhayes, the great bugbear of Josephine's married life, had apparently quite disappeared from her horizon. Among the congratulatory letters which had reached them of late, was one from him; but Mr. Scanlan had read it and put it in the fire, and "wondered how the fellow could presume," so no more was said upon the matter.

She learnt accidentally that the artist was living from hand to mouth at Rome, or some other Italian city, so she had no fear that, in their present circumstances, he would be any longer a snare to her husband. Nay, she felt a little sorry for him, scamp as he was—remembering all his amusing ways at Wren's Nest, when they were as poor as he was now. In the almost preternatural calm which brooded over her life

—at least, her external life—she could afford to be pitiful, even to a poor scoundrel.

Mr. Scanlan came back in the highest spirits, having seen his guests away on their horses, and exhibited his own, which were far finer animals.

“And they owned it, too—and wished they had as good in their own stables; but the Earl is as poor as a rat, everybody knows. Exceedingly nice young fellows, his sons are! and I hope we shall see a great deal of them. You must be sure to be at home, Josephine, when the Countess calls. These are the sort of friends that we ought to make. Not your horrid, common-place, Ditchley people; who were well enough once, but don’t suit us now, and will suit us less and less, I prophesy. Ha! ha! my dear, you don’t know what I know. How should you like me to get a handle to my name? What do you say to being called ‘My lady?’”

He took his wife round the waist and kissed her with considerable excitement.

“Edward,” she answered in her quietest and gentlest tone, “sit down here and tell me what you mean.”

With difficulty, and at first entire incredulity, she got out of him something which, though it seemed to her too ridiculous seriously to believe, was yet a possibility ; and a note, or memorandum, which her husband showed her, which at the last minute had been given him by Mr. Stoncleigh, confirmed it as a possibility.

Lord Turberville, though very poor, was a keen politician, and deeply in the confidence of the Government, to whom, as well as to himself, it was necessary to secure the influence of the large landowners of the county. Among these, almost the largest was the owner of the Oldham Court estates. His lordship had, therefore, concocted a scheme for selecting Mr. Scanlan as the most suitable person to go up to London, as head of a deputation to present an address on a certain expected Royal event—I am intentionally obscure as to what that event was—the presenters of which address general-

ly received the honour of knighthood. It was a "job" of course; but not worse than hundreds of political jobs which are perpetrated every day in our free and independent country: and Mr. Scanlan was delighted with the idea, nor in the least astonished that such a tribute should be paid to his own exceeding merit.

"And what shall I answer the Earl?" said he, when he had expended his raptures on the advantages in store for him.

"Have you answered?" his wife asked, with a keen look.

"Well—to tell the truth—as I never imagined you would be so foolish as to object to the thing, I sent word to Lord Turberville——"

"Yes, yes, I understand. You have answered. Then why go through the form of consulting me on the subject?"

It was one of his small shams, his petty cowardlinesses, which so irritated this woman, who would any day rather have been struck on the cheek openly, than secretly stung to the heart. But it had to be borne, and it was borne. As

to the thing itself—the question whether or not she should be called “my lady”—she did not, in truth, care two straws about it. I think she would have been proud, exceedingly proud, had her husband earned a title in some noble way; but in this way—for she saw through the mysteries of the matter at once—it affected her in no possible degree.

“Do as you like,” she said. “It is much the same to me whether I am Mrs. or Lady Scanlan.”

“Scanlan! ah, that is the nuisance! Ours is such a horrid common name. If Mr. Oldham had only given us his own—Mr. Stoneleigh expressed surprise that he did not. Don’t you think, Josephine, we could assume it?”

Josephine regarded her husband with unfeigned astonishment.

“No; certainly not. If he had wished it, he would certainly have said so. Besides, to give up your own name, your father’s name——”

“Oh, but the old man is dead; he’ll never

know it. And what did well enough for my father is different for me. I have risen in the world; and who cares for my antecedents? Indeed, the less we speak of them the better."

"Do you think so?" said Josephine once more. And there flashed upon her the remembrance of the kind old woman—certainly not a lady, but a true kind woman, whose grandmotherly arms had received her own first-born babe; and of the old man, who, common and vulgar as he was, had yet a heart, for it had broken with grief at having reduced to poverty his wife and only son. These two in their lifetime Josephine had not loved much; had only put up with them for the sake of her Edward; but she recalled them affectionately now. And even for herself, the years she had borne the name, through weal and woe; alas! more woe than weal—seemed to consecrate it in her eyes.

"No," she continued after a pause, "do not let us change our name: I could never fancy myself anything but Mrs. Scanlan."

“Josephine ! how can you be so stupid ?” said her husband irritably. “I hope I am at least as wise as you, and this seems to me an excellent scheme. In fact,” added he, folding his hand, and casting up his eyes—those effective black eyes, which did no pulpit-duty now—“I think that to let it go would be to fail in my gratitude to Providence, and lose an opportunity of distinguishing myself in that sphere of life to which, as our noble Catechism says, it has pleased God to call me. For I am comparatively a young man still ; much under fifty you know, and I may live to seventy, as my father did. And your father, was he not seventy-four or seventy-five ? By the by”—and he started up, struck with an idea so sudden and brilliant that he could not keep it to himself one moment. “Since you so strongly object to our taking this name of Oldham, what say you, my darling wife, to our taking one that actually does belong to us—at least to you ? Suppose we were to call ourselves by your maiden name, De Bougainville ?”

Josephine turned pale as death. All the blood in her heart seemed to stand still a moment, and then rush on in a frantic tide. She tried to speak, but her throat contracted with a sort of spasm.

“Wait. It is so sudden. Let me think.” And she sat down a little apart, with her hand over her eyes. These never sought her husband’s; they never did now, either for help, counsel, or sympathy; she knew it would be only vain, seeking for what one cannot hope to find. All she did was to sit in silence, listening, as to the noise of a stream of water, to the flow of his voluminous talk. It harmed her not; she scarcely heard it.

But Mr. Scanlan’s sudden suggestion had as suddenly and powerfully affected her. There was in Josephine a something—hitherto conscientiously and sternly suppressed—which her husband never dreamed of; the strong “aristocratic” feeling. Not in his sense—the mean worship of a mere title—but the prejudice

in favour of whatever is highest and best in birth, breeding, and manner of life. Though she never spoke of it, her pride in these things, so far as she herself possessed them, was extreme. The last of the De Bougainvilles cherished her name and family with a tenderness all the fonder because it was like love for the dead; the glory of the race had departed. To revive it—to transmit to her children, and through them to distant descendants, not merely the blood, but the name, was a pleasure so keen that it thrilled her almost like pain.

“Well, Josephine? Bless me—how you start! You quite frightened me. Well; and what do you say, my dear?”

“Don’t tempt me!” she answered, with a half-hysterical laugh. “As Bridget says, ‘Let sleeping dogs lie.’ If I once begin thinking of such a thing—of seeing my boy César another César de Bougainville—there were six generations of them, all named César, and all honest, honour-

able men; my father was the last. Ah, mon Dieu! mon père---mon père!" She burst into tears.

Mr. Scanlan was a little discomposed, almost displeased; but not being a sensitive man, nor quick to divine motives, he set down his wife's extraordinary emotion to the excitement of possibly becoming "my lady," to say nothing of "Lady de Bougainville," which was such a charmingly "genteel" name. He patted her on the back, and bade her "take things easily, she would get used to them in time:" and then, as he especially disliked anything like a scene, he called Adrienne to attend to her mother, and took himself off immediately.

And his wife?

She had no one to speak to, no one to take counsel of. Unless her little daughter, who, sitting at the further end of the room, whither Adrienne usually crept when her father appeared, had heard all, might be called a counsellor. The girl, so simple in some things, was in others much wiser than her years---eldest daughters

of sorely-tried women often are. Adrienne, being called, said a few wise words which influenced her mother more than at the time either were aware. And she told a few things which her brothers had in confidence told her—how Louis and Martin, in their grand school “for noblemen and gentlemen” were taunted perpetually about the “Scanlan & Co.” porter bottles; and even César, fine young fellow as he was, found that, until he had established his character as a reading man, so that nobody asked who his father was, all his wealth failed to be a sufficient passport into the best Oxford society. In short, the family were suffering under the inevitable difficulties of *nouveaux riches*, which of course they would live down in time—but still it would take time. To shorten this—especially for the boys, who were of an age to feel such difficulties acutely—would be advisable if possible. And it was possible that things might be easier for the three lads, just entering the world, if they entered it as the sons of Sir Edward and Lady de Bougainville.

Weak reasoning, perhaps. It would have been stronger and braver to hold fast to the paternal name, ennobling and beautifying it by such tender fidelity. And so doubtless would have been done, by both wife and children, had the father been a different sort of father. But, as I have oftentimes repeated, life is not unlevel, and in it people usually get what they earn. In this family, as in most others, things were—as they were, and nothing could make them otherwise.

When the mother and daughter went downstairs to dinner the matter was quite decided.

“Papa,” said Adrienne, mustering up a strange courage, for she saw her mother was hardly able to speak, and going straight up to her father as he stood on the hearth-rug, with a slightly ill-used and dignified air—“Papa, mamma has told me everything, and I am so glad. I hope all will come about as you wish. How nice it will be to hear you called ‘Sir Edward!’ And just look at mamma in that new

dress of hers—she put it on to-night to please you—will she not make a beautiful Lady de Bongainville ?”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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